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## **Seeds of a New Economy? A Qualitative Investigation of Diverse Economic Practices Within Community Supported Agriculture and Community Supported Enterprise**

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**SEEDS OF A NEW ECONOMY?  
A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF DIVERSE ECONOMIC PRACTICES  
WITHIN COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE AND COMMUNITY  
SUPPORTED ENTERPRISE**

A Dissertation Presented

by

TED WHITE

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

September 2013

Department of Geosciences

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **SEEDS OF A NEW ECONOMY? A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF DIVERSE ECONOMIC PRACTICES WITHIN COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE AND COMMUNITY SUPPORTED ENTERPRISE**

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Amidst widespread feelings that capitalism is a deeply problematic yet necessary approach to economy, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) has emerged as both an alternative model for farming and as an increasingly visible and viable model for alternative economy. Using qualitative methods, this doctoral research explores and documents how CSA has become a productive space for economic innovation and practice that emphasizes interdependence, camaraderie and community well-being rather than hierarchical control and private gain. This study also examines how the many participants of CSA have built an identity for CSA—branding it via autonomous and collective efforts. This has resulted in CSA being branded as an ethical and ecological farm/food system and has also resulted in CSA being celebrated as a grassroots anti-brand owned and controlled by no-one. As CSA has built its identity, it has engaged a number of narratives and myths. Many of these myths such as the ability for CSA to

educate about and build enthusiasm for small scale organic farming have been solidly validated over CSA's history. Other myths, such as the idea that CSA inherently provides financial security for CSA farmers are more troubling and yet to be fully realized. Finally, this study also makes an overview of CSA offshoots, a variety of Community Supported Enterprises (CSE) that have grown out of and been inspired by CSA. These enterprises represent a new wave of opportunities and challenges to building economic alternatives based on the ethical principles expressed by CSA.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	viii
LIST OF TABLES.....	xi
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xii
LIST OF PHOTOS .....	xiii
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER	
1. GROWING DIVERSE ECONOMIES THROUGH COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE .....	15
2. THE BRANDING AND ANTI-BRANDING OF COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE .....	57
3. COMMUNITY SUPPORTED ENTERPRISES: HOW THE OFFSHOOTS OF COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE ARE REPLICATING ITS POSITIVE OUTCOMES.....	97
CONCLUSION.....	138
APPENDICES	
A. PROFILES OF THE FIVE CSA PROJECTS STUDIED .....	144
B. TABLES AND FIGURES .....	149
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	152

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1: A Diverse Economy .....	9
B.1: Diverse Economic Activity Occuring via Community Supported Agriculture For this study 2010-2012 .....	150

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
B.1: Context of a Diverse Economy .....	149
B.2: Experiential Learning Model for Creating Diverse Economic Practices via Community Supported Agriculture.....	151

## LIST OF PHOTOS

Photo	Page
1: A free public workshop on foraging for wild foods takes place at a CSA farm.....	37

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, capitalist paradigms have been called into question in the United States and internationally. The capitalist logic that has permeated visions of the economy for many decades has now become suspect and this has left many feeling pessimistic about the potential for capitalism to provide the seemingly endless growth, “prosperity”, and sense of security that it has conveyed as normative and permanent. At the same time, the downturn for global capitalism has bolstered interest in alternative economic practices that offer other concepts and methods of producing and exchanging goods and services. These emerging visions of economy often emphasize community needs and interdependency.

With so many capitalist institutions currently in crisis, the need for critical study of ethical, sustainable, place-based alternatives to capitalism is imperative. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), which has existed in the U.S. for over twenty-five years, is an economic model that makes use of diverse economic practices and exemplifies the growing interest in alternatives to capitalism. Many farmers who adopt (and adapt) the CSA model involve their member/share-holders in diverse non-capitalist practices such as non-market pricing (advance payment directly to farmers), volunteer labor arrangements, community land ownership, and work trades that require their members to perform a designated amount of farm work in exchange for the produce they receive. These practices attempt to foster a more direct connection between the farmer, the consumer, the food produced, and the farm landscape itself. Work trades, and to an extent

“pick-your-own” crops, facilitate for the consumer (CSA member) an improved and experiential understanding of the farmer’s challenges and opportunities.

CSA has not worked for everyone; farmers have not always had success using this model and farm members have joined and then dropped out for a variety of reasons. Still, many participants in CSA have had significant success in bringing their individual abilities and subjective values together for the highly functional collective management of farms. The number of CSA farms in the U.S. has grown from 4 in 1986 to estimates of 1,700 by 2003 (McFadden 2003) and over 2,500 today (Local Harvest 2009). The growth of CSA has included a radical kind of “branding” process in which the replication of structural elements of CSA have also been accompanied by a variety of narratives and mythologies about CSA. Though CSA is a model created by farmers for selling agricultural products, this structure has also attracted the interest of fishermen and recently spawned Community Supported Fisheries (Jenkins 2009) which emulate CSA through risk sharing, non-market pricing, protecting livelihoods, emphasizing local consumption and helping protect the environment. In addition to Community Supported Fisheries, a wide range of other Community Supported Enterprises (CSE) have also emerged, constituting an entire realm of intriguing alternative economic activity. In this dissertation, I profile a few of these CSEs: Community Supported Fisheries, Community Supported Bakeries, Community Supported Yoga and Community Supported Art. There is an abundance of academic and popular literature on Community Supported Agriculture addressing many issues along its over 25 year history. In contrast, since most Community Supported Enterprises are less than five years old, research on CSE has only just begun. Chapter 3

of this dissertation makes an entry into what I hope will be a rich future discourse on CSE. As a starting point, this research will identify and assess the diverse economic practices occurring through CSA and examine how both producers (farmers and their apprentices) and consumers (CSA members) feel about taking part in these practices. Are their experiences positive or negative? How? Why? This study will also look at the ways in which some of these diverse economic practices at CSA are then modified, expanded, and transferred to areas beyond CSA.

## **Background**

Despite an increasing relevance (and visibility) of the concept of economic diversity, the notion that Americans must inevitably toil in capitalist modes of production has been a persistent perspective which gained significant momentum in the 1950's and would only become more pervasive in the 1980's, 90's and first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A culture of capitalism, founded in part by an expectation of ever-increasing wages, expanding capacity for consumption and ever-increasing economic growth, has become intertwined with the American identity (Stiglitz 2006, Wolff 2009). By the end of the Cold War, the concept of a "New World Order" had gained considerable traction. This idea suggested an inevitable and final proclamation that a single global capitalist economy had supplanted any and all other economic structures and ideologies. As Britain's Margaret Thatcher famously declared, "There is no alternative" to global capitalism. Both enthusiastic advocates of global capitalism and its harsh critics have tended to agree with this unequivocal view, that like it or not, capitalism is the impenetrable cultural epicenter of economic thought and practice. These views all center around the feeling that

we must merely accept capitalism as the unstoppable “free-running economic system that is re-ordering the world” (Greider 1998).

Despite this reiteration by many that capitalism is simply an inescapable, unmovable force, its chronic systemic problems and negative side effects are being increasingly criticized (Moore 2009, Wolff 2009, Wolff and Barsamian, 2012). Key capitalist dynamics as explored by Marx in the 19<sup>th</sup> century such as social inequality, class conflict, uneven development, and propensity towards crisis are still evident today. These dynamics are persistent and damaging, especially as by-products of a now globalized neoliberal capitalism (Petras and Veltmeyer 2012). In the U.S., capitalism has produced an acceleratingly uneven accumulation and redistribution of wealth (Saez 2003, 2013, Wolff, 2002, 2010). Within industrialized nations, the U.S. ranks among the most unequal for wealth distribution and/or income polarity (Domhoff 2013). In the U.S. these inequities have been characterized in extremes with the super-rich known as the “1%” and all other citizens identified as the “99%”. The 1% hold approximately 35% of private wealth (defined as net worth), and by contrast, the vast majority of the “99%”, the lower 80% collectively, hold only 11% of private wealth (Wolff 2010, Domhoff 2013). In simple monetary terms, most U.S. citizens are losing their share of financial power, while a tiny percentage of very rich are building their financial power at fiercely accelerating rates. Also troubling is the fact that most U.S. citizens underestimate these extreme divisions and have mistakenly assumed the distribution of wealth is much more equitable than it actually is (Norton and Ariely 2011).

On a microeconomic scale, capitalism has also impacted the role of personal and household economies. Following Marx's theory of alienation, a variety of capitalist produced dynamics increasingly plague many contemporary workers in the U.S. and abroad. For these workers, their decision-making power is minimized, their tasks specialized and fractional, and their connection to the consumers they serve is deeply estranged. Relationships between producers and the end-product of their labor have been truncated with many workers feeling like merely a cog in the machine. (Kasser, Cohn, Kanner, & Ryan, 2007).

Despite these troubling aspects, for many people, the basic assumption persists that "the economy" consists essentially of capitalist firms, powerful CEO's and vulnerable waged laborers operating within vast, impersonal, and largely unethical enterprises. However, looking into past decades one can also trace an undercurrent of alternative descriptions of the economy. These alternate views have been percolating for years and are continuing to be expressed today. Beginning in the 1970's, feminist economic theorists such as Marilyn Waring and Nancy Folbre began to argue that the economy is actually a much more diverse assortment of economic practices; that it isn't just made up of monetary, market based exchanges and wage labor but also includes care-giving, self-provisioning, and volunteering. In contrast to capitalist practices, these diverse, non-market practices were theorized as having the potential to strengthen community interdependency and create mutual benefit for humans and their environment (Gibson-Graham 2006). One such example of the influence of feminist economic theories is seen in recent United Nations

data collection and policy making. The U.N. now calculates the global labor force of unpaid household workers—the “housewives” and “househusbands,” grandparents, sisters, brothers, aunts and uncles who cook, clean, raise children, and assist each other, but do not receive a paycheck— account for almost half of global economic activity. This acknowledgment by the U.N begins to validate the existence of and enormous potential for diverse, community-oriented economies operating in parallel to global capitalism (United Nations Statistical Division 2000).

The Community Supported Agriculture movement in the U.S., pioneered in the mid 1980’s, provides its own dynamic example of an alternative to capitalism. In contrast to capitalist farming operations, CSAs are based on diverse, community-based economic activity. As an alternative to the many market-driven, export-oriented, large-scale, technocratic agricultural enterprises, CSA tends to strive for a modest permanence rather than short-term growth and maximum profitability (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli, 2007). Despite their many differences, most CSA farms have been founded on tenets that emphasize a symbiosis of sustainable livelihoods for farmers and consumers, interdependent local communities, and ecologically nurtured landscapes. CSA also privileges meeting local needs over expanding markets geographically. The growth of CSA reveals a contagious diffusion of the CSA concept rather than a centrally controlled colonization of existing farms. Despite being a “movement”, a “model”, and in essence a “brand”, CSA is also simply an evolving, contested set of ideas and practices, not an authorized certification program with set standards. The autonomous spread of CSA clearly demonstrates the existence of an alternative to the familiar capitalist models of

food production, distribution and consumption. Thus, CSA is also an attractive example for considering the potential of diverse community-based economics in a larger context beyond agriculture, such as the aforementioned Community Supported Enterprises.

### **Objectives of Study**

The objective of this research is to identify possible strategies for expanding diverse, alternative-capitalist and/or non-capitalist community-based economic practices through CSA and CSE development. In support of this goal I hope to answer the following research questions: What types of diverse, non-capitalist economic practices take place as part of CSA and CSE? Are these practices working or are they dysfunctional? How does the experience of engaging in these practices influence economic practices at and beyond CSA and CSE? To answer these questions I collected data to describe which geographic conditions, practices, experiences, and interrelationships at CSA have had a positive impact on expanding diverse economies and which have had neutral or negative impacts. For the core of my research I investigated five CSAs in Western Massachusetts: Brookfield Farm, one of the oldest CSA projects in the nation, founded in 1986 in Amherst, MA; Common Wealth CSA, a multi-farm cooperative founded in 1998 and operated out of Greenfield, MA; Simple Gifts Farm CSA located at the North Amherst Community Farm Land Trust, founded in 2006 in Amherst, MA; Natural Roots CSA, a horse-powered CSA in Conway, MA begun in 2006; and Pioneer Valley Heritage Grains CSA, a grain and legume CSA based in Shutesbury, MA since 2009 (For additional info see Profiles of the Five CSA Projects Studied in the Appendices).

The critical study of diverse economic practices is at the core of this research. As a reference for investigating and understanding these practices, Gibson-Graham's diverse economy diagram reveals a variety of economic practices and structures both historical and contemporary using the categories of transactions, labor, and enterprise, as shown in Table 1 (Gibson-Graham 2006). This diverse economy diagram has since evolved (Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2013) but I include the earlier version here since it is the one that guided my research approaches.

**Table 1: A Diverse Economy (from Gibson-Graham 2006, p. 71)**

<b>Transactions</b>	<b>Labor</b>	<b>Enterprise</b>
<p align="center"><b>MARKET</b></p> <p align="center"><b>ALTERNATIVE MARKET</b></p> <p align="center">           Sale of public goods            Ethical 'fair-trade' markets            Local trading systems            Alternative currencies            Underground market            Co-op exchange            Barter            Informal market         </p>	<p align="center"><b>WAGE</b></p> <p align="center"><b>ALTERNATIVE PAID</b></p> <p align="center">           Self-employed            Cooperative            Indentured            Reciprocal labor            In kind            Work for welfare         </p>	<p align="center"><b>CAPITALIST</b></p> <p align="center"><b>ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST</b></p> <p align="center">           State enterprise            Green capitalist            Socially responsible firm            Non-profit         </p>
<p align="center"><b>NON-MARKET</b></p> <p align="center">           Household flows            Gift giving            Indigenous exchange            State allocations            State appropriations            Gleaning            Hunting, fishing, gathering            Theft, poaching         </p>	<p align="center"><b>UNPAID</b></p> <p align="center">           Housework            Family care            Neighborhood work            Volunteer            Self-provisioning labor            Slave labor         </p>	<p align="center"><b>NON-CAPITALIST</b></p> <p align="center">           Communal/cooperative            Independent/self-employed            Feudal            Slave         </p>

As Gibson-Graham suggest, diverse economies could include alternative *transaction* practices such as barter, gift giving, government allocations, and local currencies. They could include alternative *labor* arrangements such as volunteering and self-employment, and alternative *enterprise* models such as non-profits or worker cooperatives.

Since risk sharing and interdependence are ideals central to CSA, the diverse economic activity taking part at CSA farms could likely contribute to building “community economies”, collaborative economic spaces of ethical negotiation (Gibson-Graham 2006). Subjects who participate in community economies themselves have a variety of needs, skills, preferences, perspectives and cultures and thus may be well-served by a diversity of economic arrangements. This study will pursue a greater understanding of the processes and pressures of diverse community economies within this context of interdependency. In other words, how does the economic experience of “community” actually manifest in community supported agriculture? What negative or positive impacts does this have on diverse economic activity?

## **Methods**

Qualitative research methods were chosen for collecting data. Given that the fundamental theme of this study is to highlight diverse outcomes within the data, opening up the research to a wide variety of epistemological approaches was a strategic decision. Taking into account the variation in operational systems, scope, and goals inherent in the various CSA research sites and the variety of participants recruited, my research inquiries were

purposeful rather than randomized. The result is a unified analysis within a multi-case qualitative study.

Interview questions were formulated to seek data on how individuals come to CSA, how they engage with the experience and how that experience affects their other economic perspectives and behaviors. One significant aspect of this data gathering methodology lies in the diversity of economic options and possibilities it has documented. Since this research emphasizes asking *how* participation in CSA has affected economic thought and decision making on the part of the subjects, the following qualitative data gathering methods were chosen for their ability to capture complex personal economic histories, a wide range of personal economic practices, and the diverse circumstances and motivations that drive these practices (Glesne 2006).

*1) In-depth Interviews* were conducted with farmers, farm apprentices, farm-members (aka shareholders) and others who were associated in some way with a CSA (44 interviews). For chapter 3, which examines a very broad range of non-farm Community Supported Enterprises, 12 additional interviews were conducted with: non-governmental advocates for fishermen, “CSArt” artists and staff of arts advocacy organizations, bakers, and a yoga teacher and two of her students. These mostly consisted of approximately 1 to 2 hour, face-to-face, taped or digitally recorded interviews, with exact transcripts serving as the data source prior to processing. A few of the last CSE-related interviews were conducted by phone, digitally recorded and transcribed. In all, a total of 56 in-depth interviews were conducted.

2) *Focus Groups* were used in one instance, conducted with 5 farm apprentices who all worked at the same CSA. This consisted of a single, 2 hour, tape recorded discussion session. This focus group format created a rich opportunity to examine the agreements and disagreements about shared and individual experiences on the farm.

3) *Participant Observation* (P.O.) was utilized to study and assess physical differences in CSA operation (and the social conditions these environments produced) such as farm location and proximity to members, number of acres farmed, systems of food distribution, public gathering spaces such as barns, livestock areas, food distribution areas and spaces where educational workshops were given, etc.. P.O. entailed on-site visits and intensive observation, field note-taking, photography, and informal conversations with farmers and farm members. P.O. also provided opportunities to take part in various work or social events, such as harvest days, cider pressings, grain processing demonstrations, educational workshops on chicken raising and foraging for wild edible foods, special training workshops for CSA apprentices, livestock tours, farm festivals, and organizational board meetings. In short, I engaged in as many activities as possible to see how and where creative economic innovation might be occurring in relation to CSA and CSE. In various ways, and at various times I became even more directly associated with my subject of inquiry. Most significantly, I was a CSA member of one of the five CSAs I studied (Simple Gifts Farm) and a board member of the land trust NGO that partnered with them. My affiliation with these two organizations occurred during the research gathering period. Though an inquiry into these relationships between CSAs and their

various partner NGOs would make an interesting and worthy subject of investigation, the research data presented here focuses almost no attention on those particular dynamics. Besides these roles associated with CSA, I was also a member of two different Community Supported Fishery programs for short periods during the data gathering process. And, for the research on Community Supported Yoga, I attended several yoga classes and talked with and/or interviewed several members. I also interviewed the program's two founders (one of whom is my wife.) These experiences and proximity to several dimensions of community supported endeavors provided a richness to my analysis. The connections also complimented my extensive literature review process greatly and helped me place some direct experiential knowledge alongside the many articles, essays, books I was reading—and helped me in interpreting my extensive interview data as well. Despite my closeness to certain people and projects I decided not to insert myself into the project as a research subject but to maintain a role as an informed and participating observer.

Since important research questions required that interviewees have some sense of what I meant by diverse economies, I showed them the aforementioned diverse economies diagram as a way to visually explain what diverse economic activity could be. This had the benefit of performing a kind of visibility for diverse economic activity. By looking at the diagram, interviewees became aware that economic activities they took for granted were, in fact, often non-capitalist, non-market, non-waged or otherwise “alternative”. I also made and incorporated my own “context of a diverse economy” diagram (see Figure B1 in Appendices) using it in conjunction with Gibson-Graham's diagram. This circular

diagram showed market, waged, capitalist activity as just one element *contained within* the much larger range of diverse economic activity. Later, at conference presentations I shared a re-worked version of the Gibson-Graham diverse economies diagram, filled in with specific activities I had observed at CSA (see Table B1 in Appendices).

### **Reading the Chapters of this Dissertation as a Whole Work**

The three chapters presented in this dissertation are written in the style of separate journal articles. However, they are also meant to form a whole work that: 1) demonstrates that Community Supported Agriculture is a fertile and productive site for practicing diverse community-based economic activity that increases mutual support and interdependency. 2) describes and theorizes the evolution and proliferation of CSA as being driven by autonomous and collective processes, aided by an alternative (non-corporate) approach to branding CSA. 3) describes the emergence of CSA offshoots, non-agricultural Community Supported Enterprises that have modeled themselves after CSA and have forwarded many of CSAs founding principles and practices. These chapters, when read as one work, identify CSA and CSE as being able to produce ethically motivated, diverse economic alternatives and they examine the participatory identity-making that characterize CSA and other CSE movements. When strung together, the chapters also create a thread between the past, present, and future of Community Supported Enterprises as a whole, revealing both the processes and outcomes that have made it an economic model that often benefits and transforms its participants. Ultimately, this research document provides a way to better understand diverse visions of the economy, and to identify and consider new methods for building alternatives to capitalism.

**CHAPTER 1**  
**GROWING DIVERSE ECONOMIES THROUGH**  
**COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE**

**Abstract**

As a compelling alternative to mainstream agribusiness food production and distribution networks, the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) movement has become increasingly visible. Besides being a template to pursue sustainable farming, CSA has also influenced new visions of economy. How has participation in the numerous flexible spaces of production and consumption impacted farmers, apprentices, members and others engaged with CSA? As a response to the notion that “there is no alternative” to global capitalism, this study asks the question: How are CSA participants using the diverse alternative economic practices common to CSA and building upon them to co-construct new realms of economic possibility?

Invoking Gibson-Graham’s theories of a “diverse economy” and their “politics of possibility”, I suggest that by growing diverse economies, CSA fosters many practical and meaningful alternatives to capitalist production and exchange models. In contrast to capitalist systems, many economic practices occurring via CSA prioritize ethical and environmentally conscious options. As a model that has resisted being co-opted by the “1%“, CSA remains a vibrant and largely successful economic vision for members of the “99%”. Research informing this paper consists of qualitative empirical data collected during a three-year study at five divergent CSA enterprises in Western Massachusetts.

Key words: Community Supported Agriculture, food, alternative, diverse economy, sustainability, capitalism

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## **Introduction**

Is community supported agriculture helping build an alternative economy that circumvents or softens some of the more exploitive aspects of capitalism? Following this broader query, this article will investigate the more specific question: How are CSA participants using specific diverse economic practices common to CSA and building upon them to co-construct new realms of economic possibility?

To explore this question, I briefly lay out some fundamental distinctions between industrial agriculture and CSA, review existing literature which hints at CSA as a revolutionary alternative economic structure, and then provide a summary of the concept of a “diverse economy”. Next, I provide the findings from empirical data collected over a three-year period that reveals some of the many intriguing economic practices and economic visions growing out of CSA today. Ultimately, suggestions are offered on how to strengthen CSA’s potential as a generator of economic options; and I argue that if we are to successfully develop viable alternatives to the monoculture of capitalism, the economic diversity that CSA fosters is worthy of investigation and merits our careful consideration.

In her seminal critique of industrial (and organic) agriculture, Guthman lays out three unique characteristics of agriculture itself: its dependence on biophysical production (subject to the impacts of weather, pests, disease, etc.), its real and symbolic power in producing food that guides and responds to cultural needs and tastes, and agriculture's particular reliance on the finite resource of farmland. Considering these characteristics as foundations, we can describe the main thrusts of industrial agriculture. Using chemical inputs, mechanization, and technology (including genetic engineering) industrial agriculture has sought to combat and overcome some of the limits of biophysical production. It has through the use of marketing and distribution, sought to manipulate and shift cultural tastes away from diversity and nutrition and towards specialization, efficiency and profitability. And industrial agriculture has shifted power away from farmers--instead favoring suppliers, buyers, and distributors. This has led to increasingly speculative land use and land valuing (Guthman 2006, pg 63-68). And importantly, within this industrial agriculture paradigm, the consumer's role has been to remain passive and uninformed.

In stark contrast to industrial agriculture, Community Supported Agriculture presents a very different paradigm as evidenced by its original principles and subsequent development. CSA moves away from chemical inputs and technology and (re)embraces seasonality, natural biological systems, and more emphasis on human (and animal) labor. It promotes concepts of crop/food diversity, eater-knowledge, and cultural participation. And CSA rejects the profit-driven land speculation of industrial agriculture, instead attempting to envision farms as place-based "farm organisms" that can be community

owned and stewarded. In a variety of ways CSA has sought to de-couple farmland from the commodity market and reclaim farming from the sole realm of production and consumption putting it (back) into a realm of activity that could also feed the spirit (Vandertuin 1986, Groh and McFadden 1990, Henderson and Van En 1999).

These visions of CSA created by its own pioneers and rephrased countless times by subsequent farmers, farm members, journalists, and others portray a basic collective identity for CSA. However, rather than having standardized goals and methods, CSA must be understood as a highly participatory endeavor, informed by unique geographies and driven by a combination of subjective viewpoints, approaches and motivations. Galt has recently problematized the sometimes confusing multiple definitions of CSA, pointing out how the growth and diffusion of CSA has been mis-represented and misunderstood (Galt 2011). In this paper, when referring to CSA, I am invoking the simple but useful definition he suggests using to describe CSA: “to create a relationship between farmers and consumers in which risks and bounties are shared. CSA customers buy shares for a season by paying a fee in advance.” (Galt 2011, NASS 2010). For quantitative research, a simple definition like this is indeed very helpful. But despite the fact that all the CSAs used as case studies in this paper can be captured by this minimal definition, I remind the reader to also keep in mind the subjective, messier, more multi-faceted explanations of CSA that are vital to the qualitative in-depth consideration of CSA as an economic influence with diverse expressions and manifestations.

The possibility for Community Supported Agriculture to transform economic identities, habits, relationships and visions has been hinted at in academic and “popular” literature for many years. Many suggest that CSA offers an opportunity for its participants to prioritize community-based ethical and environmental concerns over efficiency, growth, and consolidation aimed at maximizing profit (Schnell 2007, Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007).

In 1994, Gary Lamb wrote “The desire to form new social and economic forms lies at the heart of CSA. It’s potential for growth is only limited by the participants thoughts, feelings, and will” (Lamb 1994, pg 10). Lamb suggests connections between CSA and Rudolf Steiner’s concept of an “Associative Economy”. Steiner’s ideas, especially Biodynamics were a significant influence to many early CSA pioneers and his “Associative Economy” envisioned “refashioning an alternative more human economy”. An essay by Imhoff furthered the idea that CSA was a radical economic alternative in part, simply by its publication within the book “The Case Against the Global Economy” (Imhoff, Mander 1996). More recently, Schnell writes that CSA fosters an awareness of place-based economic connectivity evidenced by the fact that those “...who maintain their CSA membership often come to a broader understanding of the web of connections of local economies, food, community and the environment” (2007, pg 13).

Other recent research has provided examples of how CSA is encouraging an “ethical consumerism” (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007) and an “ethics of care” (Jarosz

2011) associated with a “post-capitalist politics” (Gibson-Graham 2006). These and other writings insightfully muse on CSA’s potential to transform economic thinking, but have not presented much in the way of empirical evidence. While CSA has established itself as a compelling agricultural alternative, it’s impact as a stimulating model of economic alternatives—of economic diversity--has often been overlooked or under-investigated. To more deeply explore economic diversity at CSA, this article uses empirical evidence that specifically describes this aspect of CSA.

Results from this study reveal CSA as a space for economic openings and experimentation—not a fully realized solution. My goal has been to examine CSA, not so much as a way to produce or distribute food or re-imagine farming but to explore the diverse, ethical and perhaps more sustainable economic alternatives that arise from CSA. How and why do CSA participants engage so eagerly in non-capitalist economic practices such as barter, foraging, gifting, gleaning, sharing, donating, receiving, and volunteering? How does CSA bring participants together to collaborate on community land-purchases and co-ownership? While these diverse economic practices have always existed--long before capitalism-- CSA appears today as a particularly rich and fertile site in which such economic diversity flourishes.

### **Noticing Diverse Economies at CSA: Background and Methods**

The initial inspiration--the seed, as it were-- for this research came from a casual conversation I had with a CSA member. She said that she split her CSA share with a neighbor. Instead of the neighbor paying his portion in money however, they had agreed

that he would mow her lawn. He was short on cash, and her big yard was too much work for her. No one told them to do this. They initiated this creative and adaptive exchange strategy themselves. Were other CSA members also creating their own innovative economic systems and practices? Was there something about CSA that might be particularly stimulating for rethinking and enacting alternative economic activity? Later in a formal interview this CSA member explained further.

I'm not growing the food in my yard and giving it to him, but it seems almost more akin to that. It wouldn't be like going and buying him the vegetables (at a supermarket) and having him mow my yard or something. It seems more an extension of these other kind of neighborly arrangements we have... We've been doing it for four years now. We're both happy with it.

Penny, CSA member

Using the data seedling described above, this qualitative research project was conceived as a way to assess the impacts of participating in an alternative economic model and to see how those impacts led to new economic thinking and activity by the participants. Community Supported Agriculture was chosen to explore because of its continual and accelerating growth not just as an agricultural model but an economic model that has presented deep commitments to ethical, sustainable practices, and has remained open to diverse sets of economic approaches (Schnell 2007).

To grasp some of the structural variety inherent within CSA, this study investigates five different CSA projects all located in the Pioneer Valley of Massachusetts (see Profiles of CSAs in Appendices). A fundamental goal of this research has been to highlight diverse personalized outcomes so using qualitative methods and creating an ethnography was the organizing principle for data gathering. Participant observation and in-depth interviews, recorded and transcribed, make up the majority of the data represented here along with additional data from national, regional, and local NGO's involved in analyzing and promoting CSA operations. The five CSA projects yielded both individual results and some unifying patterns. These CSAs were chosen to represent examples of: both large and small memberships, well-established and new farms, remote-rural and in-town locations, fully privatized operations and ones working in partnership with non-profit organizations. One of the CSAs investigated uses only draft horses and no tractors, another produces only grain and dry beans, and no perishable crops. One farm is amongst the very first CSAs in the U.S. while another is just getting established and operating in a unique suburban area. One CSA investigated here is a cooperative of several farms that brings together farmers operating on vastly different scales of production. These are a few aspects that represent the variety of CSA enterprise within this study and also reflect the many differences amongst CSAs nationwide and globally.

When choosing subjects for in-depth interviews I made purposeful selections amongst the three primary groups of CSA participants: farmers, apprentices, and members. All farmers and at least one or more apprentices from each CSA were interviewed. Farmers welcomed me to talk with members informally at food distribution days and other farm

events and this is where I recruited many members for in-depth interviews. With a few significant exceptions, the majority of interviewees represented typical CSA demographic tendencies: white, educated, white-collar workers (Schnell 2007). A small sub-group of interviewees were neither farmers, apprentices, nor current members at any of the five CSAs but were linked to these CSAs in other ways. They included CSA advocates working for other organizations, a local banker who had set up a no-interest loan program for paying CSA memberships, an educator who presented wild edible plants workshops at various CSAs, and a woman who kept goats at one of the CSA farms but was not a member of the CSA. In total, 44 interviews were conducted with CSA participants.

In one case, a focus group format was used to interview farm apprentices from one of the larger CSAs. This produced both shared and individual reflections. Apprentices generally exist in a very particular and more temporary space—in contrast to the CSA farmers who employ them and the CSA members they serve. They often form strong micro-communities and their particularly passionate and compelling testimony on diverse economies often stood apart from that of farmers and farm members. Apprentices were acutely aware of the financial challenges of securing land and operating a CSA, and many were on the cusp of confronting these challenges for themselves.

During each interview process, an attempt was made to define the term “diverse economies”. Since this is not a well-known concept or term, I often used Gibson-Graham’s diverse economies diagram (2006) to explain to interviewees what I meant by the idea (see Table 1 on page 9 ). The diagram lists categories of transactions, labor, and

enterprise and gives the familiar: market pricing/wage labor/capitalist system as just one example. Under that are other examples of alternative transaction, labor and enterprise structures and also examples of nonmarket transactions, unpaid labor, and noncapitalist enterprises. Exposing interview subjects to this diagram often had a powerful performative effect. For many of them, the act of seeing these diverse, often informal economic activities listed as part of “the economy” was revelatory. It also helped them to recognize and become more aware of their own diverse economic practices. Had their experiences with CSA encouraged them to engage in more diverse economic activities within and/or even outside of their CSA? If so, how had this occurred? What activities or systems other than typical market transactions, waged labor and capitalist enterprise had they taken part in at CSA? Responses to these multi-layered questions formed the core of the research findings.

In addition to conducting interviews, participant observation allowed me to study and assess physical differences in CSA operation such as farm location and proximity to members, number of acres farmed, scope of distribution, appearance of the farm, and public gathering spaces such as barns, pick-your-own fields, livestock areas, food distribution areas and educational sites. In addition to the participant observation I did at distribution times, I attended various work days, harvest festivals, cider-pressing parties, open-houses, tours, educational workshops and organizational meetings. These forays proved invaluable to get a sense of what CSA participants were actually experiencing. How did it feel to come get their food at this time/place? What was it like for these people to come together at a CSA-sponsored workshop and learn about wild food

foraging or the resurgence of local wheat growing? How did these experiences impact their views on the economy and their own economic practices? As a participatory researcher, my own association with CSA includes being a farm apprentice (many years ago), and more recently, a CSA member, and a board member of a community land trust that hosts a CSA. Not unlike the majority of my interviewees, I see CSA as a set of exciting potentials that are often realized but are also prone to some profound challenges.

The “diverse economies” theoretical perspective used for this inquiry emerges from a very inclusive sub-field of economic geography, championed largely by J.K. Gibson-Graham. They point out that economic difference and diversity exists in parallel to the totalizing hegemonic economic discourses which assume that market transactions, waged labor, and capitalism as fully and permanently dominant. Gibson-Graham claim that one result of capitalism is that it has rendered other diverse (and often more ethical and sustainable) economic practices as either invisible or insignificant. The discourse of “capitalocentrism” proclaims an end-game within economic thought, while diverse economies discourse instead suggests continual/endless possibilities of exchange, valuing, and relationships (Gibson-Graham 2006). This investigation of CSA observes the economic diversity that Gibson-Graham speak of, and examines how it is initiated by farmers and then replicated, re-interpreted, and expanded upon by CSA members, farm apprentices and (surprisingly) sometimes even those with only very brief or minor associations with CSA.

An additional goal for this study was to contribute to the diverse economies literature that considers and makes visible alternative, non-capitalist and/or hybrid capitalist economic organizations or activities such as: worker-cooperatives (Chatterton 2005, Cornwell 2011, Hoover 2007) local currencies and complementary currencies (North 2010, Lietaer 2002) the care economy (Folbre 2001, Healy 2006), the gift economy (Godbout and Caille 2001), and other alternative economic practices and spaces (Leyshon, Lee, and Williams 2003, Gibson-Graham 2006, St. Martin 2007, White 2008).

This study also engages with some of the academic literature on CSA and alternative food networks. In particular, qualitative work that has looked at and often problematized social issues such as the obstacles to broader participation in alternative food systems based on ethnicity and class, since CSA and many other alternative agrifood networks remain somewhat exclusive largely because of economic and/or cultural barriers (Slocum 2007, Stanford 2006). Various notions of localism and divisions between rural and urban identities (DePuis and Goodman 2005, Hinrichs 2003, Nabhan 2009, Winter 2003) have also been reflected on for this study. While localism has sometimes been critiqued as a “defensive” mechanism that can blind its promoters and participants to environmental and social injustices, this study uses localism more literally as a point of engagement between production and consumption rather than an ideological politics that privileges certain geographic contexts. Other work which this paper is in conversation with explores gender, food, and farming. Some of this work suggests that women are enriching an ethical politics around agriculture that is impacting the relationship between farming and natural resources and also around the deeper motivations of farmers themselves (DeLind

and Ferguson 1999, Wells and Gradwell 2001, Jarosz 2011). While this paper on diverse economies doesn't focus on a gendered analysis of its findings, it is deeply informed by a perspective that has been collectively shaped by several feminist economic geographers.

Some food and agriculture literature has looked at scaling up alternative food networks and asking whether or not CSA could "feed the world" (Cone and Myhre 2000, pg 31). This is a very interesting question, but one I won't attempt to answer here. Other studies have offered field data to examine how community food security can help foster economic security and food justice (Feenstra 2002) which is quite relevant to my investigation. Still other studies have assessed CSA with the intention of providing practical feedback to CSA farmers, members and promoters (Lass et al 2003, Oberholtzer 2004). This work has been useful here in comparing (and usually validating) my regional findings with other geographies.

The "popular" literature on CSA is also necessary to include in this review as it has offered both useful case studies and inquisitive philosophical discourse (manifestos, we might even call them). Traugher Groh and Steven McFadden's *Farms of Tomorrow* (1990) and *Farms of Tomorrow Revisited* (1997), Robyn Van En's 1996 compilation handbook "Basic Formula to Create Community Supported Agriculture" and her later collaboration with Elizabeth Henderson *Sharing the Harvest* 1999 (updated in 2007) are the seminal works on CSA written by its own pioneers, which share practical how-to's combined with more reflective and reflexive questions about CSA. These popular books as well as the last two decades of academic research on CSA yield a great amount of

speculation on how CSA can or cannot create a sustainable agriculture paradigm, why/how CSA consumers may or may not be committed to such an undertaking, and how farmers feel about the whole thing.

### **Capitalist Economy and Diverse Economy**

If CSA is indeed a space for economic possibility—a site of significant economic experimentation and creativity existing in contrast (and in resistance) to the often rigid structures of capitalist systems, why is this unusual or important? How does a capitalist economy differ from a “diverse economy” (Gibson-Graham 2006)? Prior to the 2008 global financial crisis, a powerfully felt example of capitalism’s vulnerability, the notion that Americans must inevitably toil in capitalist modes of production has been a persistent perspective. A culture of capitalism has become deeply intertwined with the American identity. For over 150 years capitalism rewarded Americans with better living standards via seemingly endless wage increases that finally began to taper off in the 1970’s. For the American people, capitalism’s rewards became an expectation rather than a bonus (Wolff 2008). And internationally, by the end of the Cold War, a concept had solidified that a single global capitalist economy had supplanted any and all other economic structures, ideologies or possibilities. “There is no alternative!” then UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher famously proclaimed. Since this point, socialism has been marginalized and concepts of democracy and freedom have become nearly synonymous with free-market capitalism. But the story of capitalism’s ascendancy has also been accompanied by another narrative.

In the 1980's, feminist economic theorists such as Marilyn Waring and Nancy Folbre began to explore the economy as a much more diverse assortment of economic practices that includes compassionate care-giving as much as competition and exploitation, and that this work could include not just waged labor, but unpaid domestic labor, bartering, sharing, self-provisioning, volunteering, cooperative ownership, etc. (Waring 1988, Folbre 1986). Waring in particular questioned the typical accounting logic that lead governments to claim human tragedies such as car accidents as good for their GDP. If instead, the economy could be understood as a more diverse set of exchanges, this could help us create an accounting that acknowledged human health and satisfaction not just monetary income (Waring 1998). Over time, and despite a common predisposition in academia to concede the dominance of a globalized capitalist economy, feminist economists formed another perspective. They theorized that these diverse, "alternative" economic practices had potential to create positive long-term community interdependency and mutual benefit to humans and their environment rather than exploitation and destruction (Gibson-Graham 2006, Cameron 2008).

Today, the destabilization of global capitalism and loss of faith in its preeminence has bolstered an interest in alternative economic visions and practices. In response to a perceived capitalist monoculture, other economies which incorporate greater diversity and create or re-establish less hierarchical economic flows are now receiving more consideration. The U.N. calculates that the global labor force of unpaid household workers--the "housewives" and "househusbands", grandparents, sisters, brothers, aunts and uncles who cook, clean and raise children but do not receive a paycheck--account for

almost half of the global economy (United Nations Statistics Division 2013). Still, most information on the internet, airwaves and in textbooks capitulate the capitalist fixation (either in critique or admiration) by ignoring the vast world of diverse economies. With so many capitalist economies currently in crisis, the need for more investigations into ethical, sustainable, place-based alternatives to capitalism is imperative. Community Supported Agriculture is one example of an economic model which exemplifies and fosters this growing interest in alternatives and invites us to undertake more nuanced study.

### **Research Findings**

Using Gibson-Graham's diverse economies framework as an ontology for examining the economy of CSA, the following data shows the variety of economic activity which CSA produces. In addition to the specific examples which this data describes, it is also enriched by the accompanying reflections, critiques, and aspirations that CSA participants expressed. Categories of diverse transactions, labor, and enterprise that CSA foster are used as an organizing tool for conveying the results of this research.

### **Diverse Transactions at CSA**

Transactions are literally the give and take of economy. A capitalist economy is built on market based transactions. Power dynamics that are confrontational often emerge from these transactions. Buyers and sellers within a capitalist marketplace easily find themselves taking on adversarial roles, trying to out maneuver each other, and create one-sided advantages. As an alternative, can CSA provide opportunities to take on new roles?

Through the fundamentally unusual practice of advance payment for unknown goods, CSA disrupts the expectations of transaction—and to varying degrees refutes the concept of market valuing. One CSA member interviewed described her discomfort with the typical buyer/seller relationships that most capitalist economic exchanges involve. She referred disdainfully to “all of these tricks” that sellers would use to “get” her money. “...there’s a lot of suspicion there”, she admitted. But “with the CSA model you can get away from some of that” she said. “It’s just a totally different mindset, ... a different way of buying things. It’s a different setup for the whole transaction part.” She likened the farm share transaction to an “investment” motivated by trust, saying “I think with the CSA it’s like I’m buying into your farm, and your whole harvest. ...I’m trusting you...”.

CSA farmers also see a significant difference in how CSA operates counter to capitalist formulas. Farmers and members place a monetary value on ethical intention, rather than on quantifiable product.

... the essence of the trade is also non-capitalist. Meaning like anytime you say: “Well, I’m going to sell you an item. But if the item doesn’t get made, I’m not going to give you a refund.” Like if I don’t deliver you the item, no refund. That is very non-capitalist. That’s koo-koo pants, which is great. ...And it’s essential to the issue of farming that it’s done that way. So the concept of CSA, and the way that goods and services are primarily transacted, is non-capitalist.

Dan, CSA farmer

In addition to the inherent unpredictability of farming, three out of the five CSAs examined here chose to allow another element of unpredictability by offering sliding scale prices for shares, further challenging notions of a market price—and drawing CSA members into the more active role of deciding themselves how much they would pay. Experimentation with pricing and transactions provided revelations for some farmers. One farmer admitted his desire to make more money at his farming, but acknowledged (partly through the aid of this research) that through his openness towards economic diversity he can actually have things which might seem out of reach for a small farmer working within a strictly capitalist marketplace. For example, he barter with a local chiropractor a season's CSA membership (five months of fresh produce) for unlimited chiropractic treatments for he and his wife. "...in that particular situation" he says, "what I do is valued at the same rate as a doctor". This farmer had used food as a currency and from these transactions realized that in some instances, food could take on a higher than market value. Other examples of non-monetary currency used in CSA transactions included the increasing acceptance of Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) vouchers and Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) provided by the USDA to low income citizens.

Several interviewees said they were members of multiple CSAs concurrently.

One interviewee who was a member at three different CSAs was volunteering with a newly formed land trust organization that hoped to purchase an existing farm property and host a new CSA there. In addition to the vegetables, meat and grains she was getting

at three separate CSAs, another reason for her participating in multiple CSAs was to see how each worked. As someone who hoped to support the creation of a new CSA in the region, her own memberships provided a forum for research. She was aware of and enthusiastic about the connection between CSA and economic alternatives both for herself and for her community. Juggling parenting and her volunteer work she spoke of her own need for having flexible child care for her daughter, and conveyed a curiosity about economic options that addressed these needs—in this case, a combination of volunteering and earning “time dollars” through a local “complimentary currency” project (Lietaer 2002).

Some of the volunteer hours that I put into Grow Food Northampton, I can get time dollars for... Grow Food Northampton is starting out with zero funds to pay people like me. I don't have a ton of money for childcare... I want everyone's needs to be met. How do we do this without actual money?

Jen, CSA member, co-founder, Grow Food Northampton

When the organization that she helped start did successfully purchase their farmland and help the new CSA get off the ground they also instigated two innovative programs fostering diversified transactions: one doubled the value of SNAP/food stamps for low income CSA members and another program provided subsidized memberships for low income seniors. These programs began to address some of the economic barriers that have constrained CSA membership demographics.

Other examples of alternative financing and CSA surfaced in this research. Kim, a member of a local CSA and the business development manager at a local credit union explained the origins of the “farm share loan” she helped create. Part of her institution’s mission had been to collaborate with other non-profits and cooperatives. The credit union had begun to see CSA as fostering a kind of cooperative venture between farmers and members and wanted to improve the potential for more members to participate in CSA by offering some financing options. She expressed questions that came up for her and her colleagues.

...why aren’t we doing business with more coops in the area? That’s one of our principles that’s in our mission statement, that’s who we want to be. That’s the difference of a credit union from a bank. That makes us a unique financial institution.

...we thought well, there is a way to help the farmers, because if we can fund the farm share, there are lots of people that two payments, that’s a lot of money. So if we could break it up over six to nine payments, the farmers get their money at the beginning of the season, which is when they need it. And it’s win/win.

Kim, CSA member

The result was the creation of a zero percent farm share loan offered to members of the credit union to use to pay CSA memberships, for any CSAs in the region. Recipients of

the loan could take up to one year to re-pay it. The process of applying and qualifying for the loan was relatively simple—though not guaranteed. She acknowledged the positive marketing potential that partnering with local CSAs brought to her institution but also referred to other outcomes which strengthened local, alternative, cooperative business endeavors. “So was the motivation to provide the loan to grow our business? I would say yes, but indirectly I would say it was primarily a means to support businesses we feel have the same philosophy that the credit union does.”

Several of the CSAs in my study set offered some form of public educational programming. These workshops, tours, and other activities might focus on local farming history, cooking or basic agricultural science. At these events there were discussions on topics such as conserving energy, “reducing food miles” by reducing transport distances, and increasing biodiversity. Many of these discussions had a significant economic undertone to them, especially in encouraging a do-it-yourself ethic. One popular workshop offered at several CSAs taught a cultural practice older than agriculture itself: gathering. Gathering represents a form of non-market transaction (Gibson-Graham 2006) and these “Edible Plant Walk” workshops had attendees realizing there might be such a thing as a “free lunch”. These events were taught in the early summer and took place at several CSAs. At one such event, attendees introduced themselves, stating who they were and what their interests were. “Hi, I’m Lisa and I want free food!” announced one woman. Her sentiment got quite a few laughs but also a sincere and palpable approval from the crowd. Another attendee, Sharon, ...a high school teacher explained “I thought I’d plunge in and try to find out more, ...so I can be more of an expert for my students.”

A young man announced “I’m Pete, I’m a student...and I want to save time and money...” Interestingly, most of these attendees were not members of the CSA. They had heard about the event from a variety of websites, or noticed a flyer on a telephone poll. The workshop, free to the public, provided an overview of how to identify and use wild edible plants. The workshop leader, a charismatic middle-aged man engaged the group with questions, provided a wealth of information but also made room for several other “experts” amongst the audience. The crowd followed him around to ditches and other uncultivated areas of the farm closely examining leaf shapes and seed heads. Many used camera phones and/or spiral notebooks to document and/or share images and information. By the end, many people had accumulated large bags full of edible “weeds”. No money had changed hands. No one had even consciously grown this food, it had been an invisible resource but now newly discovered it was heading to many households for consumption. The leader of the workshop explained later in a formal interview that he was not a CSA member himself, never had been, but he liked the idea of CSA (he preferred to gather and glean on public and private lands, and pick from his own garden). He acknowledged CSA farms as good places for his workshops and wrote grants to state agencies to fund himself to do the workshops, then offered them for free—charging no admission fees. I attended two of his talks, and interestingly in both cases he received some additional “pay” in fresh vegetables from the CSA.



**Photo 1: A free public workshop on foraging for wild foods takes place at a CSA farm.**

**(Photo: Ted White)**

### **Diverse Labor at CSA**

Creating fair and ethical systems for laborers has been a profound challenge for centuries. Farmworkers have often been victims of exploitive labor arrangements; at worst, as slave laborers in the past, but even today, as very low paid and disenfranchised workers. One way that CSA disrupts some of the unfair dynamics typical between farmer, laborer, and consumer is to blur the identities between these roles, bringing each role more into collaboration with the other. Many CSAs have offered work trades, volunteer opportunities, or invited members/consumers to pick some of their own crops—allowing them to temporarily becoming producers. These and other arrangements create potentially transformative experiences of labor for CSA participants. Some form of work trades occurred at all of the CSAs studied here. Each had a fairly loose and individual

approach to engaging this system of labor. By the time my three-year field research period was complete, the one farm that still had a formal work-trade requirement for its members had phased it out too. None of the farmers seemed interested in making member work-trades a *mandatory* element of the labor input. One farmer summed up his feelings saying: “I generally don’t allow work trades, for the fundamental reason that most people over-value their labor, and they under-value how much food should cost.” Contrary to the hopes of early CSA pioneers, CSA farmers do not often make a living comparable to their community members. CSA members often make much more than their farmers and yet farmers are reluctant to confront their members with this reality and provide true transparency. But despite the awkwardness of creating equitable trade arrangements, and the lack of mandatory work trade systems at the CSAs I studied, many work trade arrangements did exist. They were usually initiated by motivated CSA members on an individual basis and were often welcomed by farmers.

Several CSA members I spoke with traded their labor for food by working as organizers/greeters/cashiers on distribution days. They would set up produce displays, answer questions, and sell value-added goods from other local producers. For this work, they were given a full share in trade or a partial trade plus a discounted share price. Similar examples of diverse labor systems included short term volunteer arrangements where laborers received food in trade for field work or other services. One farmer traded food for website and advertising services. Interestingly, these work-traders offered dual perspectives. They were, on the one hand, CSA members consuming food, and they were also un-paid laborers helping to produce and/or distribute the food. In addition to being

eaters, they also represented the interests and needs of the farmers. How did these arrangements begin, what motivations brought them into being and where could these arrangements impact the larger goals of these communal enterprises? One interviewee explained why and how she started a work-trade, acknowledging that one of the reasons was that she was low income, but also knowing the farmers had a history of “finding ways” to embrace the diverse economic practices she wanted to take part in. In regards to these blurred identities of paid/unpaid, consumer/producer, she spoke emphatically of wanting to create a new “measurement of worth” and finding that possibility at her CSA.

I think that it was based on need... I wanted to be part of the CSA and I wouldn't have been able to just afford it. And (these farmers) can't do that endlessly, but have a wide berth for those of us that need that. And I've seen them do it with other people too, finding ways. ...I love bartering. I think it's a really great way to go. You know, one of the difficult things...in our time, is this measurement of worth, of output, of product, of skills.....

...I teach during the year. And then in the summertime I have a gardening business, and I have more free time. ...So it was clear that they (the farmers) had a need which was, the summer is their busy time. And they had young children who needed good care, and they know that I'm capable of that. So there was a need there, and it satisfied the need that I had, which was to have a (food) share.

Maggie, CSA member/worker

While looking after the farmer's children in exchange for her food share, she observed the dynamics of the farm more closely. She noticed how busy the farmers were and thought they needed someone who could focus more on greeting and interacting with the members on distribution days. She proposed a new position for herself. She would assist people in the distribution barn, act as the cashier for purchases of various other goods sold at the CSA, and most importantly—be there to connect personally with the members. The farmers agreed to have her take on this new role. In this case, her labor performed via a work-trade allowed her and her farmers to both realize and strengthen shared goals for the CSA as a communal enterprise. Talking about her new role as a farmer-member liaison she said this:

...every human being wants to be encountered in a deep way. And that's part of the absence of community. You can become anonymous. You can go for weeks or longer, and not have someone look at you and say, "Hello. I see you. I'm curious about you." ...it doesn't have to be a big fancy to-do. But it's just that feeling of, "hello", and "you're welcome". "I'm so glad you're here", and "how are you?", with as much as we can cover of that in a moment. It's essential.

...(members) feel, obviously, nourished by the food itself. But then there's this other aspect of feeling nourished--of one human being needing another human being, and feeling part of something...So we saw that it wasn't just a nice thing, but it was an essential piece to making the farm truly nourishing.

This dynamic where CSA participants straddle roles of consumer and producer may hold significant potential. Creating space for ideas to generate from a consumer perspective and then be performed by that same person on the production end may allow more solidarity between the roles—and result in more ethical and sustainable outcomes at a CSA or elsewhere. Aside from work trades and on a more minimal level, when CSA members get out in the fields for pick your own crops—they temporarily experience a role shift from “clean” consumer to “dirty” farmer. They endure heat, dust, mud, and begin to feel, if briefly, the demanding physicality of “stoop labor”. This walking in the farmer’s shoes might offer some insights into both its pleasures and discomforts. Similar opportunities which provide such distinct and yet fluid economic role reversals are not commonplace.

In a focus group, I spoke with five CSA apprentices. At the end of the season they were exhausted and disgruntled, critical of the farmers they’d been working for and yet also highly reflective, passionate, articulate, and resolute. Their deep sense of camaraderie and mutual respect was referred to repeatedly, and despite their various complaints, collectively they seem empowered. When asked what they thought were some economic “possibilities for situations that aren’t exploitative, that get around the pressure of a market...” They spoke excitedly about reciprocal labor arrangements, in-kind contributions, and self-provisioning. Beginning this conversation one of them declared succinctly that they aren’t training for the economy, “We’re training for the apocalypse!” and they all laughed—but another apprentice quickly confirmed this sentiment, saying “we talk about this all the time” and then added:

It is so funny. I like civilization. But really—what is coming out of this for me is the idea of the shit hitting the fan, it's pretty real for me now. Society can't sustain this way. Something is going to happen and I think we are seeing that. But...the fact that I now have an ability to self-sustain...to know how to provide, is a huge, huge asset just to my sense of well-being. That idea that if there is land, I will know what to do. And then I'll be okay. And even more, let's take it to another level, that I could help provide for others around me...

Emily, CSA farmer apprentice

These apprentices rallied around a refusal to engage with entrepreneurship in a manner that they see as stacked against them: "Scale down and do it without having a bank because you are never going to win as a farmer." one of them said. When inquiring about how they envision starting their own farms (CSA or otherwise), I was struck by how one apprentice responded, laying out a simple unequivocal plan she had for acquiring land by appealing to the generosity of older farmers in the area she grew up in:

I'm going to go door-to-door and knock and be like, "All right. Here is the thing. This is where I grew up. This is what I want to do. Are you using this (farmland)? I will lease it from you for a reasonable amount that I could afford, like a dollar. And I will give you all the food that you could have." And I am just going to keep

my start-up costs low. And if I can't do it that way, I won't do it until I am able to do it that way.

Steph, CSA farmer apprentice

### **Diverse Enterprise at CSA**

The farmer's market, yes, it offers more options. And I like supporting a number of farmers. But at the same time I think there's a different depth of relationship, both for the people and for the land when you are a CSA shareholder. And you're also saying, "okay, I'm making a commitment... I believe in this farm. I believe in the farmers." So there's that element of trust building and faith that also I think is really powerful. And you don't get as many opportunities to do that in the economy, as in the CSA model.

Caroline, CSA member

In connection to the diverse transaction and labor activities going on at CSA, CSAs often present diverse enterprise structures that are non-capitalist or hybrid capitalist. Two of the CSAs I investigated partnered with non-profits who created community land-trusts to purchase the CSA farm land. In one of these cases, all farmers were employed by the non-profit, and financial decisions were approved by a board of directors. Another CSA that was capitalist (a private enterprise employing waged workers) collaborated closely

with a non-profit land-trust organization to fulfill collective needs: permanent preservation of the land, communal ownership, public education and coordinating volunteer work that benefited the farm.

Three of the five farms had been involved in successful efforts to preserve the land they worked by raising funds through a combination of private donations and state and local allocations. In these cases, CSA farmers and members collaborated for long term goals. In other cases, farmers collaborated with their members on short-term projects which yielded immediate results. One farmer spoke specifically about how the CSA membership had become a group whose collective interests could be channeled into economic activities beyond their own farm and how this influenced his sense of collective economic possibility. In this particular case, this farmer (also a guitarist/lead singer) and his band had helped organize and perform at a benefit concert for a local charity.

...There's no doubt that that was me being able to marshal the resources that we've made as a community institution ... there's this whole thing that has been developed by the farm...being an open space, and being a positive thing for a lot of people in lots of different ways. You know, that kind of just blew me away. It's like 300 people just show up (at the concert)...If we hadn't done whatever we'd been doing here for 15 or 16 years, that's just not going to happen. And that further solidifies those things that I was feeling...you can take...what you've done and parlay it into something else that can be positive. We can get 300 people

to come out for a lot of things. It's pretty cool if you can get them to come out and raise \$5,000 dollars for local food kitchens and things like that. That's awesome.

Dan, CSA farmer

CSA members also can become enamored with the inclusive visions and collective power that CSAs and partner organizations can bring to bear. One CSA member who went on to join the board of directors of her CSA's land trust organization had this to say:

I'm both a bit mystified, but also just charmed by the whole enterprise. ...it's not really like me to volunteer to be on a board, but I was just so intrigued by it all. I just thought I would learn a lot, and I feel that I am learning a lot...

...and it's a nice sort of small place, not too entrenched, as far as I can tell anyway... sometimes you work at a place where there's sort of things you can never even mention [laughter] and the farm doesn't seem to be that way at all. It seems that you can bring up anything...so it's a very, very interesting exercise of people learning to get along and solve problems together. I think that's what I most admire about it actually, is that. It's a little model for doing that. It's very impressive.

Pat, CSA member/CSA land trust board member

Several other interviewees had been involved as both CSA members and members of CSA land trust organizations. Interactions they'd had with their farm motivated them to become more deeply involved in the CSA community in a variety of other ways. One CSA member used her farm as a site to start a micro-scale business incubator for artists and craftspeople who were CSA members.. "I wanted to create some kind of a venue where people could actually support, with money, their fellow members. So crafters seemed like a great idea." The crafts fair she organized has run for over 10 years and given emerging artists a venue to direct-sell their work in a non-capitalist system. She also spoke of the mutual benefit to farmers and members of helping grow the membership and how the arts event visually enriched an already attractive environment ideal for introducing prospective members to the farm: "I also wanted this to be a place where people could bring friends who were thinking about joining. And to come on a day when there was color—not that there's not enough color... but something extra that showed community as well."

Another interviewee was also very active on the board of a CSA land-trust organization. He had put in many volunteer hours of administrative work, participated in farm clean-up days, fundraised on behalf of the farmers and helped organize several community events at the farm. Interestingly, he wasn't a CSA member—and his brief personal experience of CSA membership had been largely negative and unsatisfying. A conversation with him revealed his experiences.

Interviewer: What's been your overall (CSA) experience?

Former CSA member: Actually, not good. It might be a surprise... the people we were sharing with... and my wife didn't like the arrangement at all. They just found that the quality of the products that were coming out of the CSA, and what they were doing with it, and the whole thing, was just not meeting their needs. You know, we were...putting a lot of greens into our compost we weren't using.

He described the challenge of trying to divide the share between his own household and the neighbors he shared the food with to be frustrating--mentioning the particular annoyance of trying to split a single head of lettuce. To him this process was "always kind of just clunky." But despite this experience and no longer being a CSA member himself, he still supported the CSA concept and was volunteering lots of time to make it work in his community. The bigger vision of participating in the environmental stewardship, and communal farming enterprise still compelled him. He spoke of how he remembered seeing the land after it had first passed from private ownership to the community land trust.

I had heard that it was becoming a local farm. I saw the signs...It felt more open. It wasn't just some farmer would say, "Hey, get off my land. You know you're trespassing." So then, I walked (on the farm), and I said, "Wow. This is an incredible place. It really does stretch between all these neighborhoods." I thought, "Wow. I'd actually love to see what a local farm operation is going to be like and participate in it." And I thought it was a good venture to get involved in.

Carl, former CSA member, CSA land trust board member

Thompson and Koskuner-Balli speak of CSA as “enchanted” an “ethical consumerism” by offering an alluring alternative to the disenchanting world of rational, anonymous, technocratic food production and consumption. They report CSA members as feeling that CSA is “something”, authentic and tied to landscape—while in contrast, a globalized enterprise such as McDonalds is “nothing”, indistinguishable, built on exploitive practices and is place-less (Thompson-Koskuner-Balli 2007, Ritzer 2008). For the CSA land-trust board member who hadn’t enjoyed being a CSA member, the positive macro-symbol of CSA seemed to outweigh his negative micro-experience of being a CSA member himself. CSA was a worthy idea, that transcended ethical consumerism—which in this case, had not been so enchanting to him. Yet, the complex organism of CSA, collectively nurtured, was also an example of “enchanted” ethical production that did stimulate his economic imagination and sense of possibility. As an example of his creative thinking, he mused on a potential connection between household economic flows and lending and CSA farmland financing.

There's got to be a sort of central bank for CSAs or something like that, that would make a lot of this more direct and easy.” ...there are great models in families, you know...when I borrowed money, my mother-in-law was good enough to loan us a few thousand dollars. My sister loaned us a few thousand

dollars. And we paid it back. We kept that interest in there, you know, rather than giving it to the bank...And I think CSAs should be able to do that...

Other CSA members also saw the enterprise as providing options and models for entrepreneurship which they felt they could enact themselves at some later date.

Many of the participants of this study expressed some sense of CSA being a validation for their sense of the potential for economic alternatives and as a positive example of the power of initiative taking, of creating rather than waiting for opportunities. One CSA member, a young college student offered this reflection.

I am thinking that when I do find stable employment, that I want it to be in some kind of co-operative business environment. ...basically, seeing the CSA function has been really powerful to me, because it's made me think about ways that I can do something on that scale. It's really overwhelming sometimes to think about the things that people do that are really powerful and really foster a lot of change, and to think, well, how did they get there, and how did they do that? But to see something function that close up, and within your own community, I think opens up whole new possibilities. And I think I feel more empowered to maybe even down the line start a co-op, or start something up on my own, instead of just becoming frustrated because I can't find something.

Sophie, CSA member

## **Conclusion**

This study reveals how community supported agriculture provides a rich environment for the growth of diverse economic activity. The CSA concept itself represents a broad and lofty set of agricultural and economic goals that is seldom fully realized by any one enterprise but acts as a star above the horizon to orient towards. The loose set of ideals, systems and available resources differs greatly from CSA to CSA yet many participants appear to be attracted to and inspired by this diversity and the participatory nature of it. The varied approaches to CSA transcend any particular formula or scale of production and distribution and thus CSA collectively results in countless dynamics of solidarity, conflict, vulnerability, resilience, commitment, and engagement. One troubling sore-spot is that CSA farmers are earning low incomes--a reality that runs counter to the initial hopes of the movement's pioneers. Yet, CSA is achieving many of its ambitious aims and its growth suggests an overall wide-spread belief in something equitable, nurturing, and worth propagating. Lass et al's reflection on their 2001 national survey on CSA reveals some of these feelings and concludes hopefully:

We know that farming in general represents a challenging profession for monetary reward and financial security; this appears true for the respondents to this survey. But, according to the respondents of this survey, farming provides a satisfying profession in terms of the quality of their life and their ability to contribute to the quality of life for their workers, their community and the quality of the environment. And, their CSA operation enhances these experiences.

(Lass et al 2003, pg 23).

Considering the results of exploring CSA and diverse economic activity which are presented here, what policy recommendations or other interventions might be suggested? Here are a few. A key aspect of CSAs growth and success as an economic stimulator has been its autonomous development largely outside of the realms of government intervention. However, there are some policy recommendations I offer in regards to my findings. Most of the CSA farms I studied benefited greatly from agricultural preservation restriction (APR) funds. Increased state and/or municipal government support for APR programs would allow more CSAs to invest in long term improvements and maximize community farmland stewardship efforts. Furthermore, APR funds have often enabled land to be owned via Community Land Trusts (CLTs). CLTs form the financial backbone of many of the longest running CSAs in the U.S. and the CLT itself is an example of an alternative economic arrangement that deters speculative and destructive land use by removing farmland from the market. CLTs can help protect a broad range of small and larger properties in both rural and suburban areas. An increase in secure land available to CSA enterprises will result in more participants who can engage in and learn from the ethical and environmentally conscientious economic practices common to CSA.

Also, more partnerships between CSA and other economic innovators should be undertaken. As Donahue suggests with regards to CSA and environmental education, CSA should increase its educational efforts through partnerships with citizen groups, NGOs, and interested individuals (1994). Since CSAs themselves exemplify economic

innovation and diversity, more formalized educational programming via speakers, tours, and workshops that touch on alternative economics should be undertaken.

One such example observed in this study: the wild foods foraging tours given at several CSAs taught both the awareness and practice of gleaning. Another example, Pioneer Valley Heritage Grains (PVHG) CSA's "meet-your-farmer" tours provided a direct and powerful context for a public discussion of energy use in agriculture, local economic development, self-reliance, and sustainability. PVHG funded these tours through the Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research Education program. More explicit education on economic alternatives could also take place via collaborations between CSAs and local worker, consumer, and producer cooperatives, credit-unions, local currency efforts, time banks, fair trade enterprises or myriad other agencies engaged in promoting alternatives to market transactions, waged labor, and capitalist enterprise. Organizations engaged in volunteer efforts and collecting and/or (re)distributing donations could also do well to cultivate partnerships with CSA (this is already happening but it could be increased). Such partnerships could strengthen the goals of both parties by validating each others work and enriching the context for how each other is viewed as a generator of economic diversity and resiliency. As farmers are often pre-occupied with on-site field work, it is imperative that others be willing to take on some or all of the leadership in organizing and managing these kind of educational efforts.

Some of the economic diversity that CSA has successfully cultivated may be in danger of being de-emphasized. For instance, all the CSAs studied here had abandoned a formal work-trade arrangement between farmers and members. While farmers need flexibility in

presiding over their volunteer laborers, and appear to prefer autonomy rather than rules in doing so, it is important that CSA farmers continue to engage their members in roles as co-workers, not just consumers. CSA members that see themselves only as consumers will lose the sense of interdependency vital to CSA. Weakening these relationships would also undermine the long term goals and commitments that help foster diverse, community-based economic activity, and may jeopardize the overall success of any CSA. Similarly, farmers should maintain their practice of offering alternative transactions based on mutual risk and benefit--not market pricing. They must be willing to question and/or resist the temptation to set share prices using a market value system. As more CSAs are created within a single region a sense of competition could lead CSAs to try and out-price each other. This would weaken CSA's reputation as a proponent of true-cost pricing that reflects environmental and socially conscious priorities rather than adherence to the market.

Further research which would complement the findings provided here, should include critical investigation of the narrow demographics of CSA. The consistent majority of CSA participants has been white, middle-class/affluent, educated, and politically progressive. Researchers must now ask in what circumstances might other populations also participate in CSA? What, if any, structural, financial and/or cultural changes would make participation in CSA more attractive or affordable to wider audiences? How and why are some CSAs already attracting more diverse participants? The example of CSAs encouraging more use of SNAP/EBT (formerly known as "food stamps") offers some

encouraging potential. Also, the example of the zero percent loan for CSA shares demonstrates both the need for alternative financing and the will amongst some CSA members to make it happen. Alternative/community minded financial institutions, such as the credit union mentioned here, may be an ideal fit for making such loans available in variety of regions.

Another area ripe for study is the further investigation of CSA apprentices. This could be powerfully revealing, given that apprentices are the next generation of CSA farmers. A primary inquiry might be “how are the CSA apprentices of today preparing to improve on the current shortcomings of CSA as they enact its future?” Lastly, the CSA model is emerging beyond farm landscapes and into other realms such as seascapes via Community Supported Fisheries (CSF) which are growing in U.S. coastal regions (Jenkins 2009). Investigations into CSF can generate new understanding of community supported enterprises in general and perhaps will offer a different ethnography of participants engaged in diverse economic activity.

As for the future of CSA, the highly visible social and environmental ethics of CSA do not appear to be in great danger of being co-opted or significantly undermined. CSA has existed in the US for over 25 years and the commitment to organic methods, member involvement, fair labor practices, and positive community collaborations appears generally strong. As CSA remains only modestly profitable, the temptation to exploit it will also remain low. However, if CSA enterprises give in to the more harmful tactics of capitalist enterprise, especially with regards to exploitive labor practices or

environmental concessions there could be damage to the integrity of CSA. However, amongst the five CSAs included in this study, the demonstrated commitment to environmental and ethical practices was strongly practiced.

Finally, but very importantly, there is an under-acknowledged role that CSA can play with regard to offering economic hope in a dismal era. While the U.S. economic elite jockey to increase their influence and private holdings, a much larger portion--now known as the 99%, grapple with much humbler goals (Stiglitz 2011). As they fret, and roil--and dream, what venues can a vast constituency of “99%ers” claim for themselves to experiment with economic possibility? Without adequate spaces to learn and practice the cultivation of economic diversity, will their rage dissipate into melancholy ultimately leaving them “...attached more to a particular political analysis or ideal—even to the failure of that ideal—than to seizing possibilities for radical change in the present.” (Brown 1999, pg 20)? Will they settle for roles as economic victims or will they aspire to and actuate roles as economic transformers? If their yearning is to be turned into ongoing ethical economic interventions they will need more and more opportunities such as CSA with which to try out new modes of production and exchange and try on new economic identities. It is imperative that academics and non-academics alike investigate the possibilities and positive outcomes of a more diverse economy, keeping a keen eye open for what can work.

Regardless of CSAs many real-world economic imperfections, many CSA participants approach their own economic experimentations with a deep sincerity, and a belief that

there is something worthy to be continually worked at—to be made possible. One farmer who was explicit in his admiration of CSA, also made himself clear about its many limitations and its dependency upon the capitalist agri-food industrial complex as a necessary supplement—that even in the most ideal CSA scenario, the market and all its ills still exists on the periphery as an uncomfortably comfortable back-up food supplier. Even so, for him CSA was a “Nowtopia” in-progress (Carlsson and Manning 2010), an undertaking not permanent or fully realized but deeply inspiring. His commitment to CSA stimulated both his own daily laboring and his ongoing aspirations to make community supported enterprises a visible, viable, accessible option for the future. To him, the outcomes of CSA are thus far, real and tangible –if not perfect—and offer great hope. He described CSA both as “a work” (a large project, still in progress), and “work” (a physical, intellectual, and emotional effort) which he described in this way:

...making it (CSA) good is the point... the whole thing is to make it work so that people can then say, “Oh, that can happen.” There’s so much that we don’t do because we convince ourselves that it’s impossible and you end the game right at the beginning. There’s also a whole strain that’s like we’ll only accept if it’s possible, if it’s pure. As opposed to whether it’s compromised or partial. And that to me is the other thing about making this transparent. Like this isn’t done, it’s not everything. It’s not perfect. It’s a work. It’s work.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE BRANDING AND ANTI-BRANDING OF COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE

#### **Abstract**

For over 25 years, the community supported agriculture (CSA) model has been replicated, mutated, and expanded upon by its farmers and shareholders who continually reject a fixed ideology yet simultaneously strengthen CSA as a popular conceptual “brand” in the US and abroad. This paper reveals and explores three aspects of CSA identity-making and proliferation: 1) The replication of CSA has been autonomous but with some collective unifying aspects 2) CSA makes use of both branding and anti-branding processes, in contrast to corporate branding strategies 3) CSA has created a range of mythologies, sometimes living up to these myths and sometimes not.

Despite some unifying commonalities amongst early CSAs (associations with Rudolph Steiner’s concepts of Biodynamic agriculture, Waldorf education, and Associative Economics) CSA has evolved as an open source endeavor. The mostly unorganized proliferation of CSA emphasizes autonomy rather than central organization—a trend that began with the earliest CSAs originating independently at multiple sites. With no standardized licensing or certification process (unlike “organic” or “fair trade”), CSAs resist co-optation but struggle with economic security. Though CSA remains liberated from uniform standards and regulation, debates still occur about its purpose, principles and what constitutes a “real” CSA.

This paper mixes recent empirical data gathered from qualitative research done at CSAs in the Northeastern U.S., a review of early CSA promotional material, and additional interviews with CSA pioneers. The resulting analysis may be applied to a variety of endeavors aimed at increasing consumer/producer alliances, ethical consumption opportunities, and community based economic development.

Keywords: Community Supported Agriculture, branding, autonomy, social movements

## **Introduction**

*We did not want to craft a tight definition or try to establish the criteria for identifying “the true CSA farm”. Rather we hoped to honor the diversity of this young, but quickly spreading movement.*

*--Elizabeth Henderson (Henderson and Van En 2007, pg 8)*

*CSA has certain fundamental logistical points that are similar no matter where or how it is practiced, but at the same time, it is largely an evolving and highly adaptive process...*

*-Robyn Van En (Henderson and Van En 2007, pg xv)*

*If there is a common understanding among people who have been involved with CSAs, it is that there is no formula.*

*-Traugher Groh and Steven McFadden (Groh and McFadden 1990, Pg 107)*

Despite the widespread use of the unifying term “Community Supported Agriculture” and its abbreviation “CSA”, a multitude of participants continually define, redefine, and expand the praxis of CSA. It is a symbiosis of autonomy *and* collective identity-making

that has constituted a vital part of CSA history. The identity-making process of CSA has evolved into what could be retrospectively viewed as a revolutionary kind of branding, a collective, non-hierarchical mythologizing of CSA principles and practice often centered on idealized visions of small scale farming. CSA identity-making also exhibits a kind of *anti*-branding process which positions CSA as an oppositional force, rejecting large-scale industrialized food systems and drawing energy from pointed activist critiques of corporate agriculture. This article examines autonomy and collectivity in the branding and anti-branding processes that have shaped CSA. It identifies CSA as a brand replete with a differentiated product, cultural symbolism and some political clout. It also examines CSA as an anti-brand which refuses to have a unifying logo, trademark, slogan or hierarchical systems of management or control.

CSA has flourished in large part because of its elasticity regarding definition, philosophy, and operating methods. CSAs do not require certification or licensing, and as a general rule do not expect government support *or* oversight. Aside from early CSA pioneers who discussed the potential of CSA at great length and who worked hard to promote the model in its first manifestations, the overall proliferation of CSA has been a decidedly organic effort. A wide assemblage of CSA collaborators continually argue about and reaffirm how CSA works and why it is an invaluable alternative to industrial agriculture.

Since its beginnings, the identity-making process of CSA has involved branding and simultaneously anti-branding. At the forefront of CSA branding is the alluring CSA mythology that has been constructed consciously and unconsciously by CSA participants and observers. This mythology depicts CSA as ecologically and economically sustainable, and presents CSA as a symbolic and “enchanted” place and space (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007) that dignifies farmers and promotes an enlightened and engaged community of supportive eaters. CSA also draws strength and resilience from an activist, anti-agribusiness sentiment (Schnell 2007, pg 562), in which it is viewed as a vital, perhaps even incorruptible rebellion against industrial agriculture, exploitive supply chains and passive consumerism. The branding mythologies of CSA intertwine with a variety of hopeful solutions that respond to dysfunctions of commercial agribusiness. In using the words “myth” and “mythologies” to describe CSA identity making, I do not necessarily mean an “untrue or erroneous story” (Oxford English Dictionary 2013) but more neutrally “a popular belief or tradition that has grown up around something or someone; *especially* : one embodying the ideals and institutions of a society or segment of society” (Merriam-Webster 2013). Thus, the inventorying of CSA identities and myths as well as CSA “successes” and “failures” should be viewed as subjective and evolving.

Along with branding and anti-branding, CSA history reveals parallel strands of autonomy and collectivity. Since the origins of CSA, individual farms have identified and promoted themselves both as unique localized operations and as part of a larger movement. They engage in cooperation and competition with other CSAs, with an overall effect of

strengthening and validating the CSA model and name. Counter to the tightly controlled top-down branding campaigns by larger corporations (that rely on copyrights and trademarks), the branding of CSA has been a grass-roots promotional effort, a largely unorganized, non-unified process conducted by countless CSA participants in a variety of geographic settings. CSA has also made use of collectivity, with a number of the earliest CSAs drawing on ideas and institutions created by Rudolf Steiner. These include the principles and practices of Biodynamic farming methods (where the farm is envisioned as self-sustaining rather than dependent upon inputs), Waldorf education pedagogy (promoting free-will and social responsibility) and notions of an associative economy (which prioritizes interrelationship and mutual interest between producers and consumers). CSA production systems, values, and relationship formations that linked to these Steiner concepts lent unifying characteristics to CSA identity early on.

In the past and still today, CSA brings together several groups for collaboration: farmers, apprentices, consumers, and community-members at large. It takes this combination of participants to comprise CSA. With no strict “rules” governing most aspects of CSA, each participant of CSA can to some extent influence CSA identity. This is a process of restating prior CSA ideals *and* re-shaping them. The proliferation and branding of CSA has a noteworthy parallel in the case of Fair Trade, which also represents a movement and a brand. While Fair Trade has moved towards narrower, unifying, homogenizing definitions that have enabled more participation from the corporate sector, CSA definitions, practices and partners remain diffuse and have not attracted corporate participation (more about this later).

Much of the data for this inquiry was derived via qualitative field research methods. Participant observation and in-depth interviews were conducted with farmers, apprentices and members of five CSAs in Western Massachusetts between September 2009 and November 2012. Additional participant observation was done at one CSA in New Hampshire, and additional interviews were conducted with several CSA “pioneers”, with staff at a regional sustainable agriculture advocacy organization and at a local credit union that offers loans for paying CSA memberships. A total of 44 in-depth interviews were conducted with CSA participants. Careful, in-depth review of early CSA promotional materials was also conducted with assistance from the Robyn Van En Center.

### **CSA’s Multiple Beginnings**

Early CSA projects employed systems that would gather consumers at the beginning of the growing season and have them commit payments in advance, directly to the farmers for a season’s harvest of diverse crops. Given the variable production levels of farming, early CSA members (aka shareholders) took a leap of faith, and shared the risks along with their farmers. The central point was to build a new relationship between producers and consumers independent of market pricing, where farmers could count on making a reasonable living growing a diversity of high quality food using ecological methods and equitable labor strategies. Consumers would make an ongoing financial and social commitment to support their local farmers and ideally much of the economic insecurity of farming would be mitigated by this new system. Interdependent farmers and eaters

would create an informed and supportive partnership. Farmer/producers would bring a sense of transparency to eater/consumers, who in turn would be made cognizant of the true-cost of ecological agricultural production. (Groh and McFadden 1990, Henderson and Van En 2009).

CSA began in the United States in 1986. One of these first CSAs was founded at Indian Line Farm in Great Barrington/South Egremont, MA, where Jan Vander Tuin, Robyn Van En and others collaborated to form an experiment they decided to call “Community Supported Agriculture” starting in 1986. VanderTuin, an American, had recently returned from farming in Switzerland where he had participated in farm systems that organized consumers to pay in advance for seasonal food shares and was eager to try this model in the U.S.. Around this same time, in Temple and Wilton, New Hampshire, Traugher Groh, Anthony Graham, and Lincoln Gieger founded the Temple-Wilton Community Farm (TWCF) guided by similar principles (Groh, McFadden 1990). Brookfield Farm in Amherst, Massachusetts also began operation as a CSA in 1986, lead by farmers Ian and Nikki Robb. On the west coast in Santa Rosa, California, still another “first” CSA project at The Summerfield Waldorf School Farm was founded by Perry Hart (Lorand 2012, personal communication with Hart 2012). Hart’s CSA also introduced the idea of member supported, pay-in-advance, diverse organic crop production for direct consumption by locals. Other early CSAs soon followed (all these “first” CSAs, with the exception of Hart’s project, continue to be run as CSAs today).

## **Rudolf Steiner and CSA**

Though they sprouted up nearly simultaneously, the earliest CSAs began largely autonomously. The founding CSA farmers and supporters eventually became aware of each other but knew little to nothing of each other's farm projects beforehand (personal communication with Vandertuin 2012, and with Hart 2012). Yet, these earliest CSAs share some noteworthy commonalities. Perhaps most importantly, the projects were all influenced to varying degrees by ideas and systems introduced by Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner within his broad concept of Anthroposophy. Early CSA production systems, values, and relationship formations are specifically linked to Steiner's ideas of Biodynamic agriculture, Waldorf education and Associative economics.

Most of the earliest CSA farms utilized Biodynamic farming methods—based on Steiner's 1920's era theories that a farm should strive to be a self-sustaining system or "farm organism" where soil, plant life, and animals collaborate to fulfill the needs of production (Groh and McFadden 1990). In stark contrast to industrial agriculture, Biodynamic agriculture brings together spiritual, ethical and ecological elements with the goal of enabling a farmscape to create its fertility largely from within the farm itself. Biodynamic farming practices favor the inclusion of livestock within the farm operation rather than segregated from it. From livestock, especially cows, homeopathic "preparations" are created onsite using a mix of manure, herbs and minerals sourced from the farm and spread in tiny amounts on the tilled fields. These organic preparations are the antithesis of chemical fertilizers whose components are manufactured off farm, sold as commodities, exported/imported, and applied in large quantities on commercial

farmscapes. These closed-loop ecological processes that Biodynamic agriculture promotes have been widely influential amongst small organic growers (Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association 2012) and Biodynamic strategies have helped initiate and strengthen public interest in organic farming in the U.S. since the 1930's.

The pioneering CSA farms also were in close proximity to Waldorf schools and tapped into Steiner's pedagogical ideas, visions of economy and social work. Waldorf pedagogy emphasizes and promotes the free will, creativity and imagination of the child and seeks to build an awareness of social responsibility. This social mission that Waldorf education promotes comes from the concept of a threefold society. According to Steiner, in the three fold social order, cultural life, legal/political life and economic life overlap but should remain interdependent not hierarchical. In particular, Steiner's concepts around economic life can easily be seen in the formation of community supported agriculture. Steiner felt capitalism promoted self-interest, while socialism inhibited free-will and imagination. Instead he believed that economic decisions should be made by *associations* of participants in the economy comprised of producers, distributors and consumers (Lamb, Mitchell 2004). The associations that Steiner envisioned, mirror the relationships later created between CSA farmers/producers and members/consumers (Bloom 2008, Karp 2008, Poppen 2008, Lamb 2010) who often also collaborate on the tasks of distribution. Gary Lamb, who has written about the explicit connections between Steiner and CSA states that "Steiner recommends gradually replacing the impersonal market which is based on self-interested behavior and competition with collaborating associations ... that will make informed decisions out of mutual self-interest" (2010, pg

42). This sentiment is present in the earliest expressions of CSA's goals, with Van En writing that CSA represented "something cooperative, an arrangement that would allow people to draw upon their combined abilities, expertise and resources for the mutual benefit of all concerned" (Henderson and Van En 2007 pg xiii-xiv). Groh and McFadden also echoed the concept in their book *Farms of Tomorrow* describing CSA as "the cooperation of free individuals on free land to ensure the needs of all..." (1990, pg 28).

Waldorf school curriculums that emphasized hands-on farm work also complemented some early CSAs (Hart 2012, Hartsbrook School 2012). Communities that formed around these schools often made up a large percentage of CSA's early adopters who were active participants excited to get their hands dirty. Those who appreciated Steiner's philosophies were primed to appreciate CSA. Steiner died long before the CSA era began but his legacy is undeniably one contributing factor to its branding. The anti-branding of CSA also has a Steiner-influenced connection. Many Waldorf schools discourage contact with media--especially television and more recently internet and computer games (Poplawski 2001, Pine Hill Waldorf School 2012). This pedagogical resistance to engage in popular/mainstream culture can be seen as parallel to CSA participants wanting to reject many aspects of the commercial food and agriculture industry and to some extent mass consumption itself—a decidedly anti-brand sentiment. The benefits of CSA associating with many of Steiner's ideas and institutions have also been accompanied by some limitations, namely with regards to the issue of exclusivity, and in particular, race and class. Waldorf schools have evolved as cultural spaces exemplified by whiteness and economic privilege (Dewey 2012, Soulé 2006) and CSA has replicated this demographic

with memberships comprised overwhelmingly by well-off, white populations (Schnell 2007, Guthman 2008).

So, despite some unifying elements that Steiner's ideas brought to early CSAs, each of these early CSAs remained independent, the first to be tried in their specific geographic and cultural contexts, all creating their own principles, systems and visions. CSA began with several nearly simultaneous pilot projects and control of the CSA concept, structure, and its promotion thus originated as a non-hierarchical endeavor. Van En, VanderTuin, Groh, and later a multitude of others all acted as enthusiastic proponents of CSA. The associations between CSA and Steiner have become more diffuse today, Biodynamic farming methods, though still common, no longer dominate agricultural practices used at CSA, and hundreds of CSAs exist without proximity or associations to Waldorf schools. It is doubtful that most current CSA share-holders in the U.S. would even be aware that Steiner had any influence on the movement. Yet, it's important to acknowledge that the various anthroposophical communities he inspired provided for early CSAs, some "convergence of like minded people and organizations" that helped establish the movement (Lamb 2010, pg133). Today, CSA is arguably a leaderless movement. Even Robyn Van En, whom Henderson called "the Johnny Appleseed of CSA" (Crain 2008) and who has been widely praised as the key founder of CSA is not a name known by many CSA participants. So today, more than ever, there is no central CSA figure.

While acknowledging the influence of Biodynamic agriculture and other Steiner philosophies on the development of CSA, VanderTuin emphasizes that the orientation he

brought to promoting CSA was largely independent of Steiner associations. “I wasn’t embedded in the biodynamic world, so I was a free agent...”. He acknowledges that it was a decentralized group effort to promote CSA, but also underscores the exceptional personal commitment made by Van En:

... people would inquire about CSAs, and she would have long conversations on the phone, she would write letters, she would send them information, I mean probably hundreds of people she did that personally with. I mean hundreds. That’s pretty major.

CSA pioneers extolled CSA principles in their own ways and actively sought to sow the seeds of its proliferation emphasizing that a one-size-fits-all approach was not appropriate for CSA replication. (Groh and McFadden 1990, Van En and Henderson 1999).

### **Branding and Anti-Branding: Identity Making and CSA**

A key role of branding involves differentiating a product from that of competitors (Palazzo and Basu 2007) and CSA has been performing this differentiation since its beginning. CSAs generally offer fresh, locally grown, non-uniform, organic produce often distributed directly from the farm or via non-commercial settings such as member’s homes, schools, churches, or other community centers. Thus, the CSA “product” stands in stark contrast to the chemically grown and/or genetically modified food, trucked hundreds of miles and distributed via supermarket chains. Further, the ecological and

ethical pragmatics of CSA exist in counterpoint to “McDonaldized” (Ritzer 2008) visions of corporate rationalization, predictability, and control (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007).

CSA has repeated a somewhat unified mantra that includes notions of direct investment, mutual risk and benefit, diverse organic production, and ethical consumption (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007). Yet, viewed as a whole the movement has also been staunchly autonomous, never certified (unlike organics or fair trade), and never centrally managed. Early CSA adopter, farmer Jeff Poppen described how at his own CSA, the highly principled, but non-standardized CSA model made his other certifications redundant. He felt that building a community of shareholders, had in effect, built a level of trust and understanding between producer and consumer that superceded formal regulation. “Within a few years we quit marketing altogether and dropped the organic/biodynamic certification we’d had for fifteen years. Although our practices hadn’t changed, certification wasn’t necessary anymore” (Poppen 2008).

In addition to product differentiation, branding is also expressed in the act of naming. Humans claim specificity, individuality and an identity through naming themselves. When products or services are named they become in a sense “humanized” (Danesi 2006). Thus the naming/branding process involves blending character attributes, social context, virtues, aspirations, stories, etc. Corporate branding often involves a fastidious calculated naming process. Though the branding of CSA has been a largely uncalculated, and loose process, its naming origins reveal an attempt to achieve just such a precision of

meaning and association. In regards to the process of naming the fledging movement/model, Robyn Van En wrote “Please know that every word was chosen after lengthy consideration”. In reflecting on the syntax of “community supported agriculture” she commented “we knew it was a mouthful and doesn’t fit easily into conversation or text, but to this day I can’t think of a better way to name what it’s all about. (Henderson and Van En 2007 pg xiv). The name “Community Supported Agriculture” brings forth notions of both systems and associations. Like, “Military Industrial Complex”, or “Food Not Bombs”, the name “Community Supported Agriculture” powerfully and succinctly suggests a narrative about relationships and attitudes towards broader cultural institutions and political perspectives. Initially, the words Community Supported Agriculture registered more as a concept than a catchy brand name, but that concept and its associations have now also become the brand.

In this sense, the founding of CSA can be seen as an attempt to compress a much larger vision into a seed, ready for sowing. A seed that could grow and spread into a set of alternative economic visions and practices. CSAs pioneers at Indian Line Farm spent hours debating and carefully crafting the initial language and principles that would describe and guide the replication of CSA (Van En and Henderson 2007). Temple-Wilton Community Farm and other early CSAs eventually adopted this name as well. Van En claimed that she was “adamant” about using the word “agriculture” rather than “farms”, because she “didn’t want to exclude similar initiatives from taking place on a corner lot in downtown Boston” (1999, pg xiv). This sense that CSA could grow in new ways and forms, through new collaborations of participants was expressed by many of its pioneers

(Henderson and Van En 1999). Van En, and other CSA pioneers Jan VanderTuin, and Traugher Groh produced a variety of promotional materials: various articles, books, a documentary film, and these resources repeatedly encouraged others to replicate CSA in their own contexts. Some early CSAs called themselves other names such as “CSF” for “Community Supported Farm” (Van En 1996) or CSA explained as “Community *Sustained* Agriculture” (Live Power 2013) or “Community *Shared* Agriculture” (Henderson and Van En 2007, pg xiv). Nonetheless, most projects choose to use the Community Supported Agriculture name. Despite this careful, strategic naming process that CSA founders labored over, the use of the term Community Supported Agriculture and CSA has remained free, un-trademarked and unrestricted.

Significantly, early CSA promotional material provided detailed suggestions on how and why to start a CSA but expressed no interest in controlling CSA offshoots as franchises. This essentially established a culture of autonomy for CSA, providing the freedom to adapt existing principles and practices and the right for anyone to call their operation “CSA”. However, rather than cultivate a strictly maverick culture, these CSA “how-to” materials also encouraged a sense of camaraderie and collective resource sharing between CSAs, openly describing and referring to each others CSA projects as valuable case studies (Groh and McFadden, Henderson and Van En 1999).

Each new farm or collaboration of farms both replicated CSA and re-invented it, and this autonomy fueled CSA development. One long time CSA farmer I interviewed described the sense of optimism, potential and reproducibility crucial to building the

movement.

... in a sense the entire CSA experience for people is about one other possibility. And the strength of this thing from a more grandiose standpoint has to do with the fact that...it can be sustainable year after year, then you have one example of something that happens—then people say, “Oh, that can happen. If that can happen, why couldn’t you do that a hundred times?”

Dan, CSA farmer

As the modest success of early CSAs encouraged the growth of additional CSAs, the concept proved to be a replicable model. At this point, the promotional efforts of CSA pioneers and the word of mouth enthusiasm they helped generate began to construct CSA as a known entity—a newly established brand. From these earliest days, CSA was making use of what Pallazo and Basu refer to as “the twin phenomena of brand success and anti-brand activism”—usually thought to be in conflict. They site the example of WalMart as a brand praised for its productivity, profit generation and “brand power”, but also vilified for its aggressive expansion, sweatshop sourcing, and poor working conditions. Thus, WalMart’s widespread success has activated a groundswell of detractors. So while being a super brand, they also have had to endure significant anti-brand backlash (2007, pg 333). Can a successful brand be resistant to or even benefit from anti-brand activism and have it both ways? For CSA, the answer appears to be: yes. On a modest level Community Supported Agriculture has become a successful brand *and*

*also* been strengthened by anti-brand sentiment. CSA has been able to mimic some of the basic successful strategies of corporate branding such as naming, myth creation and cultural branding yet has done so without hierarchical control or ownership of the brand. Simultaneously, CSA has also built on and contributed to the politicized sentiments emerging from the anti-branding, anti-corporate movements and discourses (especially those pertaining to food and conventional agriculture).

Before moving forward, just what is meant by “anti-branding”? In many contexts, anti-branding has come to mean the conscious and strategic effort to deconstruct and diminish the value of a successful brand. Targets of this type of anti-branding are usually massive retail franchises such as McDonalds, Starbucks, WalMart, etc. Anti-brand activists increasingly use online forums to make forceful, explicit critiques of high-profile, high-profit enterprises they see as employing detrimental strategies (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan 2006, Krishnamurthy and Kucuk 2008). Critiques posted might focus on the exploitation of workers, destruction of local economies, generation of toxic pollutants, etc.. Anti-brand sentiments related to the food and agriculture industry create an oppositional dynamic between the perceived collective community-minded ideals and practices of small-scale, independent, organic farmers and the perceived callous empire building of companies like McDonalds and Monsanto. These online anti-branding posts reach large audiences and represent greater potential impact than similar movements of the pre-internet past (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan 2006). However, rather than specifically cultivating aggressive online anti-branding campaigns, CSA can be viewed as more of an anti-brand in the sense that CSA refuses traditional corporate strategies of centralized

control and profit--the antithesis of corporate food/ag brands. Also, the anger and fear elicited by the practices of the agro-food giants (e.g. industrialized livestock production, injection of antibiotics, pesticide use, genetic modification, etc.) has been utilized by some CSA promoters to foster an impassioned resolve for participating in alternatives. This dichotomy of approaches to food and agriculture exemplified by small organic producers vs large conventional producers has helped CSA cultivate an activist urgency to attract and energize participants who see CSA as a necessary rejection of industrialized farming and corporate food brands. Further, some CSAs have successfully engaged their members in joining policy debates, petition drives and citizen actions concerning controversial agricultural practices, such as pesticide use, GMO labeling, etc.

These elements of anti-brand activism within the CSA movement have long roots. In 1988, Robyn Van En framed CSA as both a worthy concept and an oppositional force, writing that “Unlike agribusiness, which has the motto: “the end (profits) justifies the means (exploitation), CSA’s motto is: The means (community) assures the end (quality food)” (Van En 1996, pg 1). In Groh and McFadden’s *Farms of Tomorrow*, the authors provide a similar activist orientation to the development of community supported agriculture in which potential participants of CSA are called to action and must protect against the “abuses” of “poisonous” chemicals, landscape “sterility” and “exploitive management practices, including biological engineering” (1990 pg 12). Highlighting a more emotional and sensory example of anti-branding, Thompson and Coskuner-Balli note that CSA consumers “condemn industrial agriculture for producing bland and predictable goods whereas they lionize CSA as a potent source of stimulating variety and

sensory differentiation” (2007, pg 282). Ultimately, the CSA brand has been built not just on the cultural identification with something virtuous and positive, with CSAs solidly in the role of protagonists. CSA identification has also been built upon the cultural critique (anti-branding) of agribusiness-associated antagonists: factory farms, petrochemical industry, biotech, fast food, etc. (Van En 1996).

With the continued dynamics of branding and anti-branding processes, the proliferation of CSAs--which numbered well over 1,000 by 2006 (RVEC 2010)--both helped disseminate its ideals and validate its claims. CSA strengthened its reputation as a sustainable agricultural model and an ethical economic model. Interestingly, the branding of unpredictability became an revolutionary selling point of CSA product. In CSA, diverse foods came out of a system that resulted in vast quantities of some vegetables but lean quantities of others. Thus, embracing the possibility of failure and disappointment also became part of the CSA brand identity. As opposed to their consumption experiences in a supermarket, CSA members could only *hope for* rather than *count on* the arrival of tomatoes in late summer. The possibility for consumer pleasure and enchantment became part of the brand as CSA members experienced a reconnecting to land and seasonality. Casting CSA as the antithesis to McDonaldization, Thompson and Coskuner-Balli suggest that “CSA’s oppositional discourses offer an ideological rebuke” to an extreme rationalization of production and consumption common to more profit-driven agribusiness systems (2007 pg 284).

CSA farms often share a sense of camaraderie yet are not usually bound to each other

(although collaborations between CSAs who combine their produce for shares is not uncommon). The CSA brand has been strengthened through reputation building by its own participants sometimes acting on behalf of CSA in general, sometimes on behalf of single CSA operations. This is a kind of “viral branding” in which the brand is able to “motivate the right consumers to advocate for the brand” (Holt 2004, pg 14) as enthusiastic CSA members often become the best advocates. The “cultural branding” (Holt 2004) which is also significant to CSA aligns brand engagement (becoming a member) with cultural affiliation and values. As one CSA study corroborated “CSA shareholders’ social objectives dominate their decision to join” (Farnsworth, Thompson, Drury, and Warner 1996, pg 90).

According to Holt, iconic brands have “distinctive and favorable associations, generate buzz, and they have core consumers with deep emotional attachments” (Holt 2004, Pg 35). How might this definition be illustrated by CSA? One example: the five CSAs researched for this study collaborated one year to host a fundraising event for local emergency food pantries and land preservation. The fundraiser—a dance concert with live music--then became a popular annual event, and continues to highlight local CSAs as dynamic socially engaged community leaders and unique philanthropists, supported by enthusiastic “fans”. These particular CSAs foregrounded themselves on promotional material in the absence of large corporate sponsors. This particular event reveals the potential for CSAs to collectively brand with very positive associations, and draw on the many CSA members who are strongly committed to local food security and community based land preservation.

Following the tradition of commercialized brands, CSA does engage in powerful story telling and myth making expressed in the form of goals and claims. Since its origins the CSA movement has touted an audacious plan to reclaim farmer dignity and the agricultural means of production. Another aspect of the myth has been to reinvigorate consumer awareness and knowledge and to empower eaters to participate more closely in the agricultural processes, culminating in the socialized enjoyment of healthy food. As some of the “myths” associated with CSA have become fully realized both the branding and the beneficial anti-branding of CSA have been strengthened. In the realms of sustainable agriculture/food production and alternative economy, CSA is now solidly identified as a critical response and a proactively constructed viable option.

Holt writes that “iconic brands” must be attentive to “cultural disruptions” (Holt 2004, pg 39). Meaning that after the brand’s mythic identity has formed it can be damaged or made irrelevant by cultural shifts. Many cultural disruptions (some of which CSA itself has helped trigger) have instead strengthened CSAs relevance, and enabled it to become a cultural icon or iconic brand. CSA is seen as a worthy symbol in a broad and swelling movement aimed at promoting fresh, diverse, organic foods, produced on small farms for local consumption by knowledgeable and engaged consumers. As an actual model operating in the real world, CSA is viewed as both established and yet still emerging and expanding.

As CSAs evolved and replicated, much of the compelling double narrative of critique and hope that CSA had first put forth became validated. Viewed as a brand, CSA has proved

over time, its ability to deliver on many of its myriad advertising claims and gain authority. As Holt explains “...successful brands develop reputations for telling a certain kind of story that addresses the identity desires of a particular constituency. In other words, iconic brands accrue two complementary assets: cultural authority and political authority.” (Holt 2004, pg 211). In the case of CSA, cultural authority became the means with which to wield political authority. CSA expressed cultural authority by resonating with the growing desire for a more ethical and sustainable food system. CSA wielded some political authority by being—arguably—the flagship of the grassroots local organic food movement and by remaining independent from government control (labeling, certification, etc). While many CSAs have received occasional government support at state, local and/or federal levels in the form of grants and loans, CSA has not generally suffered from unwanted government interventions. This is in contrast to the organic food movement which has seen its own organic standards--and in effect its own fundamental principles--problematically re-interpreted by the USDA and co-opted by industry (Guthman 2004). CSA is not certified or regulated in the U.S. by any agency or NGO representing its “mission”. So, in essence, some of the political authority that CSA holds is the fact that it has kept itself liberated from rigid ideologies and from the realm of policy makers.

### **Tracking the Growth of CSA**

Though unencumbered by licensing or certification , CSA has been promoted and shaped by a few advocacy NGOs. Two of these now defunct organizations were CSA of North

America (CSANA) founded by Van En herself, and CSA West. Enduring organizations include Local Harvest, a resource that helps producers list CSAs, and consumers locate CSAs and the Robyn Van En Center for CSA Resources (RVEC), founded after Van En's death in 1996. The RVEC provides farmers and the general public with a range of CSA-related informational resources. Organizations such as the North East Organic Farming Association (NOFA) and other groups have also done much to facilitate dialog and resource sharing amongst CSAs via workshops and conferences.

The RVEC and Local Harvest have documented the number of CSAs in the U.S. and these quantifications have been simultaneously helpful and befuddling to some researchers, since each groups numbers differ significantly from each other and reflect the loose identifications of CSA and lack of registration requirements (Galt 2011). Adding to this ambiguity, is the fact that being listed as a CSA by any organization is a completely voluntary act. For many smaller CSAs, who don't feel the need to list their CSA with larger advocacy organizations, their projects may simply be under the radar.

The RVEC's numbers reflect a more cautious count of CSA operations, and generally include farms that adhere more directly (in the opinion of the RVEC) to original CSA principles (personal communication with Vosberg 2010). RVEC only listed 3 of the 5 CSAs I studied and did not list the pioneering Temple-Wilton Community Farm. Local Harvest listed 4 out 5 of the CSAs I researched, also omitting Temple-Wilton Farm. These lists are most beneficial as a way to generally chart CSA proliferation rather than identity and count every CSA. Nonetheless, the following numbers do give some sense of

recent CSA proliferation rates. RVEC counted 600 CSA farms in their database in 2001, by 2006, their count had almost doubled to 1,140, and by 2012, they listed 1,656. (Mayer and RVEC 2012). These numbers suggest a solid and accelerating rate of growth for CSA. By contrast, however, in 2013 Local Harvest lists over 4,000 CSAs in their database (Local Harvest 2013).

### **CSA Autonomy and Proliferation**

The largely unorganized proliferation of CSA is a counterpoint to typical notions of capitalist franchising. The efforts to define and promote CSA are characterized by a continual environment of autonomy and reflect a similar vision to that of the open source movement. Community Supported Agriculture and CSA are not trademarked, and CSA literally has “no logo”, an example of resistance to corporate ideology itself (Klein 1999). Wikipedia, which itself utilizes open source processes, describes open source as a “...pragmatic methodology that promotes free distribution and access to an end product’s design and implementation details” (Wikipedia 2012). In discussing the naming process of CSA, Van En echoed the open source sentiment saying she was “adamant” about using the word “agriculture” rather than “farms”, because she “didn’t want to exclude similar initiatives from taking place on a corner lot in downtown Boston”. A sense that CSA could grow in new ways and forms, through new collaborations of participants was expressed by many of its pioneers (Henderson and Van En 1999) and this notion suggests the willingness, even desire, of many CSA pioneers to having their existing models adapted, changed, and transplanted.

Food Not Bombs (FNB), the movement which promotes serving free vegetarian food in public spaces is a similar example of autonomous open source replication. FNB began in 1981 as a small group of activists working only in Boston, but has since spawned hundreds of “chapters” in states throughout the U.S. and abroad. These offshoots of FNB are autonomous yet co-create and strengthen an overall identity for Food Not Bombs. “The Food Not Bombs movement does not have a headquarters, director or president” writes FNB co-founder Keith McHenry. He notes that even the movement’s “co-founders have no power over the direction of the movement or decisions of any group (McHenry 2012). He suggests that diverse models of FNBs have arisen as the idea transplanted to different regions, leading to place-centered remaking of methods and strategies. Ultimately, like Food Not Bombs, the expansion of CSA demonstrates the interpretive replication of principles and methods with no obligation to a governing authority. The autonomy of CSA and its resistance to governmental and even non-governmental intervention is also remarked on in Steven McFadden’s 2003 accounting of the first two decades of CSA history.

“If CSA is going to have a solid and progressive third wave of growth and development, it’s not likely to be generated by a government program or by the publicity campaign of a well-intended nonprofit, or even so much by fear of terrorists or corrupt food. A solid third wave of development ought by rights to rise instead on merit: from a real assessment of the benefits that can come from creating and supporting community farms.” (McFadden 2003) *New Farm Magazine*, Rodale Institute 2003)

CSA is a model for farming enterprises that continues to be relentlessly re-invented by its participants, pushing it into new geographies, new scales of operation, and expanding collaborative relationships. How has it resisted standardization while still managing to build a generally unified “brand” identity? CSA is not a highly profitable venture, and from a commercial perspective, it is not highly “successful”. So why hasn’t CSA gradually diffused into insignificance? After all, it is comprised of hundreds of mostly un-networked, marginally profitable farm projects.

Despite lacking traditional economic building blocks of hierarchical control, capital investment, technological economies of scale, subsidies, and high profitability, CSAs continue to proliferate. The lack of hierarchical control of CSA has become emblematic of the movement as represented by its continual re-defining . While many CSAs describe what CSA is in similar terms, they also embrace the opportunity to define CSA uniquely in their own spatial and cultural contexts. The following profiles represent the varied definitions from the five CSA enterprises I researched in Western Massachusetts between 2009 and 2012. Simple Gifts Farm, a relatively new suburban farm in Amherst appeals to a mostly non-rural audience and explains on their website some of the basic multi-faceted components of CSA. Their definition speaks of economic interdependency, local/seasonal production and fostering more meaningful relationships between producer and consumer:

“Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a relationship that brings farmers

and eaters closer together. Members have the opportunity to enjoy seasonal eating and a deeper connection to their food source, while helping local sustainable agriculture flourish. When you become a CSA member, you pay for a portion of the farm's expenses and receive a share of the harvest in return.”

-Simple Gifts Farm CSA website, 2012

Natural Roots CSA, situated in a remote and scenic riverside location in Conway, MA describes their CSA in concrete, place-specific terms, emphasizing the consumers’ potential for becoming a significant participant in this landscape:

“Each distribution offers a great opportunity for connecting with friends and neighbors. Many families come and stay for hours. Kids love to climb the pine tree near the distribution barn, splash in the shallows of the river, watch the horses at work, and race to the berry patch together.”

“The farm is a haven for wildlife, farm life, and human life as well. By becoming a shareholder you can help to preserve and enrich this treasured resource of our community.”

-Natural Roots CSA website, 2012

Brookfield Farm, one of the larger, older CSAs in the U.S. is located in a rural, though

not remote location. It serves consumers in and around Amherst, MA as well as an urban contingent in the Boston metro area. Their farmers are paid as employees of the non-profit that owns much of their farmland. Their CSA definition is more extensive and seeks to explain both abstract concepts and concrete systems while also emphasizing the relationships that can be built between consumer, producer, and landscape.

“Our prices are based solely on the costs of production which are kept to a minimum since we deal directly with you. We are working to ensure that farms are economically sustainable. We pay our farmers a living wage and provide you with the highest quality vegetables available at the lowest price around (based on 1995 market survey). We accept Food Stamps.”

“Become a shareholder in Brookfield Farm and help promote our local economy and preserve local agriculture. Our farm provides a practical step towards realizing a vibrant and healthy local food system.”

“Brookfield Farm becomes more than just your source of food, it can truly become your family's farm.”

-Brookfield Farm website, 2012

Two of the CSAs profiled in this study made use of less explanatory formats to describe their CSA projects. The webpage of the cooperative, multi-farm Common Wealth CSA

begins with a stated intention for what a cooperative structure can bring to the creation of social bonds.

“As farmers we seek to cooperate with each other and with shareholders to develop an alternative food system that supports our interdependence while building trust with one another.”

The Common Wealth CSA webpage concludes by referencing lines from a folk song (Rosseler 1974) that celebrates the True Levelers, aka The Diggers, the 17<sup>th</sup> century English group of communally-minded agrarians who opposed the concept of private property and sought to democratize land-use on a grand scale.

“We come in peace” they said “to dig and sow. We come to work the lands in common, and to make the waste ground grow. This earth divided we will make whole, So it will be a common treasury for all.”

-Common Wealth CSA website, 2012

On one hand, this website romantically implicates CSA as part of a monumental undertaking to radically change the praxis of ownership and private enterprise. On the other hand, it succinctly describes the practical intentions of this collaborative CSA that aims to bring together both large scale and micro scale farmers in a non-hierarchical

system. By blending statements written about community agriculture three hundred and fifty years ago, with more contemporary notions of collective enterprise, Common Wealth CSA defines CSA as part of a larger historical and ongoing political and cultural struggle and vision.

The Pioneer Valley Heritage Grain CSA, (which offers members locally grown grains and beans) often describe their CSA using highly personal and seasonally based narratives in a blog format.

“Between this weekend’s distribution and the previous one, we moved *Ten Thousand Pounds* of local, organically grown grains into the eager hands of our CSA members. There were over 200 people in my living room and kitchen Saturday afternoon scooping their shares, there were five fantastic folks helping us make it all possible, and one sweet toddler happily demonstrating the new electric mill by her daddy’s side. We’re a little tired, but very, very happy.”

-Pioneer Valley Heritage Grains CSA website, 2012

As the these examples demonstrate, CSA operators choose to define CSA making use of their own terms, concepts, references, impressions and formats. Emphasizing difference, unique relationships, specific landscapes and producer/consumer interaction CSA draws on diverse expressions to collectively repeat core values. These definitions tell stories about CSA—some rooted in daily experience, some imbued with mythic proportion.

Websites aside, with a few exceptions, the CSAs examined for this research did not actively offer economic transparency or generally make financial reports available.

Both farmers and shareholders believe in CSA, and have co-created its popularity but there's a rub. For farmers, CSA represents an ideal that has generally not delivered the economical security they yearn for, but does provide an overall lifestyle they appreciate. According to Lass et al's 2001 national survey results "More than 68 percent of CSA farmers surveyed in 2001 were unsatisfied with their financial security (health insurance, retirement, etc); 32 % of those respondents were very unsatisfied" However, the same survey found that "over 57% of the farmers were satisfied with their stress level and quality of life" (Lass et al 2003). Echoing, Lass et al, Pilgeram chimes in with her ethnographic paper on alternative food production bearing the unsettling title, "The Only Thing that isn't sustainable is... the farmer". She suggests that "we need to interrogate a system that uses the personal beliefs and ideologies of sustainable-agriculture farmers to justify the personal sacrifices they make" (Pilgeram 2011). This critique is substantiated by Galt whose research identifies and problematizes CSA's "moral economy" as a "double-edged sword" that couples the allegiance farmers feel to the values of the CSA model, with their tendency towards self-exploitation and low wages (Galt 2013). With regards to the economic mythologies that CSA expresses, a tendency towards silence seems to be in operation. When I inquired of one CSA farmer, whether or not they ever made yearly financial reports available to members, I was told that no members had ever asked to see them and the farmers had never felt inclined to share them.

The ongoing dilemmas of finding long-term access to affordable farmland, retaining members, and farm maintenance haunt many CSAs. CSA also seems prone to another pressure: how can it continue to grow and innovate yet also live up to some of its deeply idealistic founding principles? Critique and argument of what an authentic CSA is or is not has been around since the beginning of the movement and continues today. The rise in some food distributors (non-farmers) identifying themselves as “CSAs” bothers some who feel these are “fake CSAs”. Today some of this debate takes place via internet blogs and reader’s responses. Here feelings that “...resellers posing as farmers is a disgrace” raise the question of whether CSA in its success as a “brand” may be co-opted, or exploited. Other critiques of “fake” CSAs complain that these middle-management entrepreneurs, call their enterprises CSAs and “pay farmers wholesale prices yet charge full retail... these services are using the positive image of CSA while simultaneously competing with real CSA farms. They are confusing to consumers and create falsely high expectations of what a CSA farm can produce” (McFadden 2012). Since there is no official definition of what CSA is, the question of authenticity remains subjective and contested.

### **Brand Comparison: CSA and Fair Trade**

With regards to the future of CSA, the example of Fair Trade (FT) may shed some light. As Low and Davenport have warned about the dangers of FT going “mainstream” so too there should be some caution taken when envisioning a widening role for CSA. FT, which can be viewed as a movement, a model, and a brand is now accompanied by a certification process that is generating profits that dwarf those of CSA. However, as FT

has defined itself more formally—ironically, the ability for it to resist exploitation and co-optation has weakened. The deeper ethical intentions which initially spawned FT now can be reduced to mere structures (Low and Davenport 2005). As a brand rooted in ethical consumption, FT has built significant awareness and support for small producers. However, in the process of scaling up, FT arguably has lost much of its commitment to truly “fair” producer-consumer relationships. In CSA, the founding principles of mutual benefit and mutual risk and notions of an “associative economy” are vulnerable too, as CSA grows and becomes continually more refracted from its source.

Many Fair Trade promoters see FT as a brand or at least acknowledge that it behaves like one “with all the key triggers that good brands have” (Sebag 2009). Yet, concerns are rising that the mainstreaming of FT and the increasing participation of big business threatens the founding principles. One FT industry advocate says of FT “I think it’s a movement and that’s how it started, but I also do think it’s a brand now, it’s a very powerful consumer brand and being a movement and a brand has real strengths...but it also has its weaknesses and its conflicts...”. (Stafford 2009). FT has enjoyed an evolution that is parallel to CSA in many ways. It is an activist oriented commitment to alternative economic and agricultural processes. However, issues of growth, expansion, control and changing identity provoke increasing discomfort among researchers and advocates about FT’s future (Low and Davenport 2005). Like CSA, FT has benefited from a loose definition and from the diverse and widespread use of its simple identifying words: the “Fair Trade” brand. With an attitude of inclusivity, the FT movement has welcomed big business into the arms of the once decidedly “alternative” brand and now Fair Trade’s

powerful brand is also vulnerable. In a 2009 debate titled “Who Owns Fair Trade?”, FT advocate Kate Sebag pondered the future of FT saying “What’s unusual about FairTrade, is that its shine, its halo effect if you like, can be used by so many. It’s not like brands normally are—exclusive. It can indeed be owned by any, by many...so long as you obey the rules you can buy into FairTrade. But the question we should ask ourselves is: are the rules of ownership tough enough? ...because sure enough every owner of Fair Trade is able to invest different meanings into FairTrade.” Proponents of FT revel in its “success” but also worry that faith in the brand is at stake (Sebag 2009). CSA advocates must also contend with the need to make CSAs more financially secure, without selling out the principles which CSAs growth is built upon.

To investigate CSA as a movement, a model and a brand, the research presented here drew on a variety of data sources. In-depth interviews with two CSA co-founders Jan VanderTuin and Traugher Groh provided deep views into the past as well as insights into the future of CSA. Early in my conversation with VanderTuin, he said “One of the biggest tragedies of life to me is that there isn’t enough time to explain things” and went on to discuss the significant resistance he met with while trying to describe and promote the CSA model in the U.S. (even amongst Biodynamic farmers). Through various examples he reflected that his experience of trying to communicate the alternative vision of CSA and germinate its spread had not been simple, easy, or quick.

He echoed the aforementioned observations that show how the wide interpretations of CSA ideology and practice had left short comings—especially financial ones. He

regarded transparency as a particular and enduring sticking point for CSA. That a CSA farmer should earn a living comparable to the peers in his/her community had been a crucial original goal. He said that as it has turned out, CSA is just one way that many farms sell and distribute their produce, instead “most CSAs are mixing systems—they lack the confidence to present the true costs of production and to stand by these costs as having to get met.” And in response to this dilemma, he wondered aloud “How do you inspire confidence?” Though deeply proud of the proliferation and many diverse successes of CSA, he pointedly referred to vital work still to be done. “For what it’s worth, the CSA thing is not done and established by any means, and I think the real values are not in the culture yet.”

Conversing with Traugher Groh produced some kindred statements to VanderTuin’s. He expressed excitement for the expansion of CSA and especially its cultivation of young enthusiastic farmers coming out of countless CSA apprenticeship programs. Too old now to farm himself, Groh’s original Temple-Wilton co-farmers Lincoln Gieger and Anthony Graham do still farm at the CSA. The farm’s survival as a highly principled, radically alternative enterprise is a monumental achievement. As a longtime proponent of the self-sufficient farm organism, Groh’s books and presentations have associated CSA identity with sustainability and localism in the deepest ways: arguing that a farm’s inputs should be derived on site and that a farm’s output should be consumed locally. He admitted however, that this CSA vision has not yet been fully realized—even at one of the oldest continually operating CSAs in the country, which he’d helped establish: “we always needed a higher idea, without that we cannot get anywhere and we have to explain this

higher idea and live it... we have basic problems at Temple-Wilton, we have no grain (produced on site to feed the cows) so we are not an organism, we have to realize that..." and he added later "...one has to be careful with these things that one doesn't get romantic."

## **Conclusion**

This article has identified CSA as a brand--replete with a differentiated product, cultural symbolism and some political clout. I've also shown that CSA is an anti-brand, rejecting hierarchical corporate control and the visions and methodologies of industrial agriculture. The anti-branding of CSA is also reflected by the lack of a CSA headquarters or profit center, and by the absence of a distinctive slogan, logo or trademark that unifies all CSAs. This paper has revealed and explored three aspects of CSA identity-making and proliferation: 1) The replication and adaptation of CSA has been autonomous but with some unifying collective aspects 2) CSA makes positive use of both branding and anti-branding dynamics, branding itself in ways that are both akin and in stark contrast to commercial branding strategies and by harnessing some of the activist urgency around fighting industrialized corporate food systems in the spirit of anti-branding 3) In the process of creating an identity, CSA has communicated a range of promotional narratives or mythologies, sometimes living up to these mythologies and sometimes not.

The ambiguities of CSA render it a continual work in progress. Many questions remain about its future. How far and how fast will CSA continue to grow? Who will be involved and what will be their goals and expectations? CSA has brought a passionate vision for a

participant controlled, multi-faceted alternative to industrial farming and the market economy. In practice, CSA has indeed helped cultivate a powerful new engagement with food systems that prioritize social and environmental ethics. CSA has also been a catalyst and a practice space for increasing diverse alternative economic activity. However, as CSA is replicated and adapted again and again, will the powerful visions that have driven its continued growth be more fully realized or be gradually diluted? How can CSAs most successfully continue to connect producers and consumers to cultivate trust? How can CSAs provide clarity about the relationships and commitments necessary for sustainable production and consumption? How can farmers use their access to members to communicate their financial concerns more strongly, and work towards gaining higher incomes?

These are some of the fundamental questions that should be pursued in future research. When examining the history of CSA one aspect is clear, CSA has been co-created drawing on a wide array of influences and participants—from the past and present, and every CSA has had the complete freedom to restate in its own words what it believes CSA to be. While many different definitions of CSA have been presented, a general sense of what CSA is has been repeated over and over. The “mythologies” that CSA participants (farmers, members, and apprentices) have collectively built have in many ways, become verified and many of the claims of CSA have been made real. However, other aspects of the CSA myth, such as financial security for farmers remain elusive.

The identity of CSA has been expressed through many voices, many perspectives.

This is evidenced by Van En's influential "book" *Basic Formula to Create Community Supported Agriculture* which is really just a compilation of flyers, to-do lists, budgets, and heartfelt essays. In it she quotes a multitude of influencers: author/artist/scientist Goethe, food/nutrition activist Frances Moore Lappe, American Indian artist and curator Alex Jacobs, Philosopher and German Green Party leader Rudolf Bahro, even The Buddha. She mentions both Indian Line Farm and Temple-Wilton, and notes a variety of experiments by individuals inspired by CSA. She states that "Decentralism has been a main theme of some of our greatest thinkers" (Van En 1996). The use of many voices to tell the story of CSA, is not only Van En's own personal perspective. CSA identity and practice has definitively been the result of an expansive collaboration of individual personalities, experiences and perspectives over many years.

CSA has benefited from its own powerful branding activities, collectively undertaken and by its counter-identity as a more politicized anti-brand symbol. Though a proliferation of "fake CSAs"—(distributors posing as farms) would detract from the CSA movement, a centralized attempt to define, standardize, limit, regulate or otherwise control and police CSA would shift collective ownership away from the thousands of participants who have made it what it is. Since the beginnings of CSA a combination of argument and optimism has led to the creation of a resilient and highly reputable brand/anti-brand. Applied to CSA, Holt's ideas on iconic brands suggest a powerfully transformative potential for CSA. He states that "Iconic brands function like cultural activists, encouraging people to think differently about themselves. The most powerful iconic brands are prescient, addressing the leading edges of cultural change. These brands don't simply evoke

benefits, personalities, or emotions. Rather, their myths prod people to reconsider accepted ideas about themselves.” (Holt 2004, pg 9).

The research presented here identifies CSA operating on a thin line. On one side is a CSA that *does* “simply evoke benefits, personalities, and emotions”. On the other side is a CSA that can continue to prod us to “reconsider accepted ideas” of ourselves. CSA today is in a “don’t ask--don’t tell” phase. Its powerful myths, both guide and restrict progress. Shareholders don’t want to interrogate CSA too deeply and farmers don’t want to reveal too much. However, by building on and demanding more from the relationships between farmers and shareholders, both groups could re-start and/or deepen their conversations about CSA and its potential. VanderTuin warns against CSA complacency, that crucial “values are not in the culture yet.” And as Groh suggests, progress cannot be made without “a higher idea”, but it is necessary to “explain this higher ideal and live it”.

With a more public critical acknowledgment of what CSA has and has not accomplished, a variety of new “to do lists” could be generated by CSAs many participants to help guide future practices. After considering the data collected and analyzed in this paper, I assert that the autonomous nature of CSA has been a strength, making CSA more vibrant, replicable, adaptable, and attractive. Anyone, can “own” and contribute to CSA, and thus it is a powerfully democratic endeavor. The collectivity that CSA demonstrates has also been a strength where CSAs learn from, support, and often promote each other. The success of CSA calls into question long held notions of the economy as necessarily hierarchical and competitive. In this way, CSA still offers a highly compelling pathway

to rethink agriculture and ideas of ourselves, our economies, and our societies.

The investigation of CSA identity, evolution, and growth presented in this paper offers an example relevant to movement building, enterprise incubation, and community development both within and beyond the contexts of food and agriculture. For these efforts, CSA demonstrates a useful combination of processes. First, the careful making of a bold visionary plan that balances hopeful desires for something better with insightful critiques for what is not working. This step draws on the expression of unifying concepts but anticipates autonomy. Second, a “letting go” phase in which the effort can be practiced, democratized, and adapted but not owned or centrally controlled. Third, the willingness and commitment to revisit the mythologies created from the prior two processes, to assess them, and make new goals and plans accordingly.

## CHAPTER 3

### **COMMUNITY SUPPORTED ENTERPRISES: HOW OFFSHOOTS OF COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE ARE REPLICATING ITS POSITIVE OUTCOMES**

#### **Abstract**

In the late 1980's and early 1990's, founders of the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) movement hinted at the possibility for the CSA model to be applied in non agricultural contexts. In fact, a diverse range of Community Supported Enterprises (CSE), have since sprung from CSA. In this paper, I explore this transplanting of the CSA model, using Community Supported Enterprise (CSE) as an umbrella term for this outgrowth. Given that CSEs borrow fundamental concepts developed by CSA, this paper asks the following questions: How are CSE's putting the fundamental principles and systems of CSA into practice? In particular, what are the positive outcomes of the localized producer/consumer relationships fostered via CSEs? How might a variety of CSEs identify and collaboratively "brand" themselves in relation to each other in order to build partnerships? Lastly, what are the challenges and opportunities pertinent to the establishment, growth and/or endurance of CSEs? In conclusion, I put up several signposts for further research.

To pursue this investigation, I analyze a small sampling of Community Supported Enterprises: Community Supported Fisheries, Community Supported Bakeries, Community Supported Yoga, and Community Supported Art programs. Data is drawn from qualitative research via interviews and participant observation. Though the amount of research on Community Supported Agriculture is considerable, scholarly research on Community Supported Enterprise is nascent. This article is intended to help establish and forward the discourse on CSE.

Key words: Community Supported Agriculture, Community Supported Enterprise, Community Supported Fisheries, diverse economy, economic development, ethical consumption, localism.

“Because the CSA concept is about building community, the logical evolution is to community support of almost any cottage industry. Members would pay for a tune-up and oil change at the beginning of the year. This "cash advance" allows the mechanic to pay for the new lift they otherwise wouldn't have money to buy.  
(Van En 1995)

Introduction: What is Community Supported Enterprise?

In this article she wrote promoting and explaining Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), CSA co-founder Robyn Van En mused on what the still very young CSA movement could evolve into. Ironically, the idea of CSA auto repair (not quite as huggable

an enterprise as organic farming) was given as an example of the kind of business that could adopt CSA principles and practices. This was the beginning stage of Community Supported Agriculture giving rise (at least conceptually) to a much broader alternative economic movement: Community Supported Enterprise (CSE).

The term “Community Supported Enterprise” (CSE) is gaining traction as a label used to describe a variety of strategic local economic support systems being cultivated between producers and consumers (Mitchell 2010, Jordan 2013, Bruhn 2013, ). Though CSE can be seen as a larger umbrella term under which Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is now a sub-set, CSA predates CSE and provides its key inspiration and points of orientation.

As an outgrowth of CSA, many CSEs also make a connection to food and/or agriculture. Community Supported Fisheries, Community Supported Bakeries, Community Supported Breweries, Community Supported Restaurants are some examples of CSEs experiencing expansion and replication (Hopkins 2010, Bruhn 2013, FarmPlate 2013). The emergence of CSE marks a new category within the vocabulary of alternative economic discourse. CSE provides an enlarged container for such economic alternatives with CSA being the most well-known example. Though the amount of research and analysis on CSA is considerable, by contrast, research on community supported enterprise as a whole is nascent. This article is intended to help establish and forward the discourse on community supported enterprise.

The research presented here reflects on the evolution of CSA, and considers the transplanting of the CSA model into other economic contexts. Besides looking at other food-associated CSEs, (I profile Community Supported Fisheries and Community Supported Bakeries), I also explore non-farm/non-food community supported enterprises using the examples of Community Supported Art and Community Supported Yoga. For clarification, I've only investigated enterprises which consciously and explicitly refer to themselves as "community supported...". This act of naming is a conscious attempt by CSEs to connect and suggest favorable comparisons to community supported agriculture.

The initial data for this article came as an outgrowth of research I conducted on Community Supported Agriculture (White 2013). This research asked "does CSA act as a catalyst for diverse alternative economic activity?" In other words, does CSA provide its participants with a fertile ground for economic experimentation and innovation? Perhaps not surprisingly, the vast majority of CSA participants I interviewed answered some form of "yes". But more interestingly, it was the broad variety of economic interventions and arrangements they imagined, talked about, and participated in that stood out. Some of those interviewed did their economic experimenting within their CSA, while others took the CSA experience and transplanted elements of it into other economic contexts, occasionally even creating other CSEs. Like I observed at CSA, I have also observed the emergence and growth of diverse economic practices at the non-agricultural CSEs examined in this paper. For a definition of diverse economic practices, I draw on an evolving set of interpretations by Gibson-Graham et al that reveals the variety of economic practices within the categories of labor, enterprise, transactions, property, and

finance (Gibson-Graham 2006, Gibson-Graham, Cameron, Healy 2013). For example, diversities within the labor category can include “wage”, “alternative paid”, and “unpaid” labor. Looking a step further within “unpaid” labor activities are other possibilities. IN regards to the CSEs examined here, one example, is the class that a Community Supported Yoga teacher taught for free to faculty and parents at a local elementary school. Another example of unpaid labor is the extra piece of art (beyond the art they’d been paid to produce for members) that a group of artists volunteered to create for each other in a Community Supported Art program. The diverse economies framework is valuable for examining and evaluating the potential for CSEs to form vibrant alternatives to capitalist economic practices. The diverse economic activity I observed at CSE also speaks to the cultivation of new relationships which this research highlights.

#### Apples and Oranges: Fitting a Variety Community Supported Enterprises Into One Box

An obvious but important unifying element amongst all CSEs is that by naming themselves “Community Supported ...” they desire to be associated with CSA, its legacy, systems, and mythologies. However, expressing this association is often done succinctly, such as “...modeled after a traditional CSA but instead of garlic, chard and tomatoes, "shareholders" receive original artwork made by local artists working in community-based and traditional arts”. CSEs that are food and farm related have some inherent similarities: they emphasis product that is fresh, locally grown, organic, perishable, etc. But toss into the mix, CSEs that offer service rather than product, or engage producers and consumers in more subjective exchanges involving the creative arts

and CSE becomes so diverse as to appear almost formless. But there are orienting points that can help contain CSE into a whole that can be studied and compared. On the whole, all CSEs engage consumers as investors who pay in advance—thus creating some level of consumer commitment, which in turn provides producers some security to engage in an alternative enterprise. In Community Supported Agriculture this has meant a farmer could buy seed, repair farm equipment, or build new greenhouses with assurance that at least some of the necessary income would be guaranteed. In Community Supported Bakeries, advance support allows bakers to buy in bulk, and receive discounts via economies of scale. In Community Supported Yoga, this means a teacher can rent a space to hold classes with minimal financial risk. In Community Supported Art programs this means curators can fund a group of artists who can purchase materials and begin production, knowing their work has already been purchased. Some element of ethical, and/or ecological production and consumption is also often practiced and promoted within CSEs. The most common manifestation of this is the effort that many CSEs prioritize providing higher/fairer wages to what are often undervalued professions. With the reduction or elimination of middlemen, CSES can also often offer lower costs to consumers as well. Both conditions being informed by ideas of social justice. Ecological sustainability is also a common goal for CSEs, with many CSEs creating structures that attempt to reduce waste and damage to ecosystems.

Another unifying element amongst CSEs is the fostering of relationships, mutual interest, and interaction between producers and consumers. For CSA farmers, this has meant having members come and help harvest crops, assist in distribution tasks, or come and

learn how to raise chickens. In Community Supported Art programs this has meant that member/patrons could meet artists, learn about their creative processes and about what personal or cultural expressions they are trying to make. In Community Supported Fisheries, this has often meant that members become more acquainted with fishers by reading online weather reports, viewing fish filleting and cooking videos, or learning about species decline, catch limitations, and different equipment or fishing methods. Despite the often virtual nature of these relationships, these are relationships being built on a conscious desire to be connected, learn from each other, and engage in mutual support. The depth and diversity of these relationship building activities is arguably the single most important (successful) aspect of community supported enterprise, and will be examined more deeply in the individual profiles of CSEs I offer in this paper.

The pioneers of Community Supported Agriculture were active promoters of the model. They produced various materials: books, articles, and a film, all of which explained CSA in detail, but also offered it up as rough draft for re-interpretation (Van En, Groh, Henderson, VanderTuin). Since 1986, CSA practitioners and participants have collectively shaped their own principles and systems within a diversity of agricultural contexts. So while each farm or CSA project is unique there have emerged several unifying principles and practices typical to CSA (White 2013). Some CSE pioneers have also engaged in creating practical guides to help guide and disseminate CSE offshoots. The Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance (NAMA), a co-founder of Community Supported Fisheries has created a “CSF Bait Box”, offering suggestions, sample

contracts, considerations for what to fish for, marketing, etc.. Similarly, Springboard for the Arts, a Minnesota based artist advocacy organization which helped establish Community Supported Art programs, has created a “CSA replication kit”. A staff person from this organization described the creation of the tool kit and expressed the complimentary aspirations of wanting to help inform the proliferation of CSArt programs but also let them grow and develop autonomously: “we would rather let other people take the model, much like community supported agriculture has spread, and use it and adapt it however they want.”

Some Community Supported Enterprises like locally and regionally-based “listener supported radio” stations have existed for long periods but are now making conscious efforts to associate themselves with the popular connotations surrounding Community Supported Agriculture. Well known community radio station KPFA in Berkeley, CA. has been referring to themselves as “community supported radio” (KPFA Radio 2013). This speaks to the successful branding of CSAgriculture—a simultaneously collective and autonomous effort--engaged in by countless participants (White 2013). CSEs piggyback on the positive narratives that CSA has employed describing that agricultural model as supporting local economies and building trust between producers and consumers. The CSEs studied here all publicly refer to CSA as an inspiration, explanation, and validation. Though not examined here, online based crowd funding enterprises can be seen as a form of CSE themselves. They act as the co-organizers or administrators of other fundraising efforts., and some of these are CSEs. These financing systems can provide interest free start-up capital and help build visibility for other CSEs. Kickstarter.com and

smallknot.com have been used by CSEs to successfully raise capital for Community Supported Breweries, Community Supported Herbalism, and Community Supported Cheese projects. (kickstarter.com 2013, smallknot.com 2013)

The influence of CSA upon the new emergence of CSE reveals several interesting comparisons. CSA elevated the perennially low profit, low visibility, low status enterprise of small farming to more noteworthy and dignified status. Small farms being subject to fluctuating markets, inconsistencies of harvests, low wholesale prices for produce, and the pressure to sell farmland. All this has compounded challenges for small farmers. As a remedy, CSA gathered consumers to pay up-front and share some of those risks. In many ways, CSA has been able to bring consumers and producers closer together as interdependent collaborators, who can work towards improving financial security for farmers (though for many farmers, attaining financial security is still elusive). Similarly, many CSEs have grown out of smaller, insecure, low profit enterprises (Bruhn 2010). In many ways, CSE represents a producer movement to attract, engage, and educate communities of ethical consumers who can help them fulfill economic goals not attainable in capitalist markets.

Community Supported Enterprises engage members as ethical consumers. With the variety of sectors that CSEs operate in, this necessitates flexible interpretations of what ethical consumption practices amount to. Recent critiques of the idea of an ethical consumer, problematize this portrayal of economic identity as being too subjective and unwieldy to study and ultimately a false identification: "...the notion of ethical

consumerism is too broad in its definition, too loose in its operationalization, and too moralistic in its stance to be anything other than a myth.” (Devinney, Auger, Eckart, 2010 Page 9). Interestingly, “broad” and “loose” are highly appropriate terms to describe the notable lack of regulatory restrictions within CSA and CSE. The autonomy with which individual CSA producers and consumers have been able to define what a CSA is and how it could operate is striking. Though “moralistic” may be too strong a term, strong ethical motivations are arguably at or near the heart of most CSEs as evidenced by the examples in this paper. Part of the critique presented in *The Myth of the Ethical Consumer* is supported by examples of large corporations who, motivated by consumer survey data, offered opportunities for ethical consumption. The ideals expressed by consumers in surveys did not amount to demonstrated ethical consumption behavior, amounting to a talk-is-cheap assessment by the authors (Devinney, Auger, Eckart, 2010). The case of community supported enterprise operates in a wholly different context. These enterprises are neither large scale nor highly profitable. “support local” “support independent” are mantras of CSE, and as a result, the ethical consumers and producers who participate in CSE don’t harbor the same level of skepticism reserved for a large corporation. The level to which the actual operation of a Community Supported Enterprise meets the perceptions and expectations of its participating producers and consumers is a more difficult question, a question where the idea of myth creation and perpetuation are indeed very relevant. Though this is a question worthy of future research, I shelve this question for another time and instead look at how CSE’s spring from CSA, and how effectively CSE’s bring forward the concepts of CSA.

Prior research on CSA examines it as a multi-dimensional, participatory model. In documented cases CSA encourages both ethical consumption and ethical production that is based less on myths than in direct experience. CSA farmers “...find little practical relevance (or resonance) in an abstract politics of ideas.” (Thompson, Coskuner-Balli 2007 pg 291). The research presented here on CSE reveals similar sentiments amongst CSE founders/producers. Though CSEs implicitly reference the positive traits of CSA on their websites and other promotional materials, they place less importance on providing extensive critical analysis of the market pressures they seek to refute. CSE’s appear to take the dysfunctions and injustices of large scale capitalist enterprise as a given—as if the CSA movement had made this case clearly enough already-- and instead spend more time explaining what their projects offer than what they stand in opposition to. Data from this investigation of CSE discovers a kindred ethic between CSA farmers and CSE entrepreneurs. This is an ethic in which the creation of deeper producer/consumer relationships themselves can outweigh the ideology they are based on. My findings suggest that emerging CSEs, like CSAs, provide spaces where “...the personal, and, most importantly, the communal become political...” (Thompson Coskuner-Balli 2007, pg 291)

### **Example #1 Community Supported Fisheries**

Community Supported Fisheries (CSF) emerged in the U.S. in 2007, first in Maine and then in Massachusetts. CSF has many analogies to Community Supported Agriculture. CSF pioneers have worked to mitigate the insecurity of fishing harvests by asking members to pay fishermen in advance. Via the promotion of direct sales, and the

elimination of a middleman CSFs often try to create alternatives to existing market prices which ideally can mean higher selling prices for fishers and lower purchase prices for consumers. Fundamental goals of the CSF model are to increase profits for local fishermen, offer high-quality seafood and directly engage interested consumers using fishery products. For logistical reasons, a large percentage of CSF members do not go dockside to pick up their fish shares so online communications, and occasional public filleting, cooking, and tasting demonstrations become a proxy for the world of fishers. (Brinson, Lee and Rountree 2011). One fundamental aspect of that world is that it is risky, with commercial fishing being one of the most dangerous professions the U.S.. (Lincoln 2008).

In addition to the context of danger, CSFs have emerged from within an environment that for fishers is fraught with challenging environmental pressures imposed by government, and financial pressures imposed by an entrenched market economy for fish selling. Interviews conducted for this research revealed complex relationships between participating CSF fishers and the various industry collaborators who they rely on. Since most CSF fishers do not sell all of their catch via the CSF model, they must continue to operate within the familiar economic systems within the fishing industry while at the same time attempting to remake those systems. Brinson, Lee and Rountree point out that “In addition to acquiring new human and physical capital, distribution through a CSF risks alienating traditional partners, particularly fish dealers.” and so “CSFs need to maintain a business relationship with the traditional infrastructure in order to sell the non CSF portion of their catch” (Brinson, Lee, and Rountree 2011). To help fishers to

transition into creating and participating in CSFs, several supporting NGOs and other partners have stepped in to assist. Some of these include the Island Institute, Gloucester Fisherman's Wives Association, and Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance). These supporting players can help fishers navigate the challenges of getting a CSF off the ground and attracting members as well as aid them in the more politically charged work of disrupting and revisioning the industry status quo. One NGO staffer involved with promoting CSF explained that despite the small percentage of overall catch that CSFs are taking, that the potential changes they represent to the industry are very powerful:

...The CSF isn't moving a lot of fish ... so it's not usurping or it's not undermining the control that some of the existing players have on the market. But politically speaking, language-wise, and public outreach wise...it starts the conversation that made the other players have to justify—why they don't do the same thing...why is it OK for a processor to bring fish half-way around the world and consider it sustainable? Those are the kind of questions that we would never have had on the table had it not been for the CSF movement. So that political discussion is a pretty big threat for a lot of the players that have been, essentially the power players in this town or in the seafood industry altogether.

One of the ways that CSFs are changing industrial practices include the promotion of less popular species, which has created new value for species whose populations are less vulnerable. Within the traditional markets (fish auctions), a limited range of species are highly valued and as a result overfished, so CSF's have alleviated some of this pressure

by making members aware of species they were unfamiliar with (the equivalent of kohlrabi in a community supported agriculture share). As one CSF operator told me “we are creating demand for species that are heretofore relatively undiscovered or obscure”. However, CSF fishers also sometimes fish for species commonly understood as endangered. This has triggered some push back as one set of fishing ethics, that of consumers and environmentalists, is challenged by the small boat fishers themselves. Their overall sense of a sustainable livelihood derived from fishing is a complex lived experience, and less dogmatic. Therefore, CSFs can provide for their members, a revealing opportunity to figuratively “step into the boots” of fishers and become more aware of (and perhaps empathetic) towards fishers challenges, methods, and motivations. Some CSFs also provide for their members a more visceral, experiential connection to their industry by offering shares of whole fish which members need to clean/fillet themselves. With a flounders two eyes looking up at them, CSF members with knives poised, confront their own curiosities and anxieties about marine life, oceans, traditional and industrialized hunting and consumption practices. Thus, more-than-human assemblages of objects (boats, nets, hooks), new and old technologies (trolling, trapping), animals (fish), systems (oceans, weather) (Nimmo 2011) become part of the CSF ontological experience for both fishers and by relation, their members.

All this attempts to create a level of transparency missing from larger industrialized fishing supply chains. To this end, the NGOs that have helped pioneer CSF and continue to promote it, express a strong desire to connect fish producers to fish consumers. They also express a desire to connect fish producers with each other in new ways,

to strengthen the deep ties that exist amongst members of fishing communities but also to get fishers to question some of the economic relationship dynamics they feel have been damaging. Referring to the need for fishers to ask for more, and explain why they need it, the director of one of these organizations stated:

...Fishermen have been involved in what I call an abusive relationship for a very long time. I'm sure farmers feel similarly. It's really interesting that these are the two professions where you cannot set a price based on your cost of production. They're told what you're gonna get paid and how you're gonna get treated. They don't know how to get out of it, they think this is the only option. there's protestation, you almost have to show them another way is possible. ...that's a huge step for them to take... that's a huge shift that the CSFs have created, is to give that suggestion that you can start a new relationship, you can be more empowered in it, you can actually even say this is what it cost me to do this and the other end of the transaction would be ok with that--because for once they're being honest... somebody's giving them the full picture. That's part of the changing the world piece that people need to be a part of. That's been the part that I've found to be —interesting, is not the right word, it's kind of disturbing, but the most important part has been to get fisherman to break out of this.

The politically and emotionally charged work that CSFs engage in has made some of the advocacy organizations both enthusiastic and occasionally skeptical about the

proliferation of new CSGs, and their motivations. Though the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance has created their “bait box” kit to help start new CSFs, their director reflected that:

When we are called upon by a community or somebody... who calls up and says: we want to start a CSF... One of the questions we ask them is: What’s the purpose of your CSF? And if it becomes clear through that conversation that what they’re really only interested in doing is selling fish. Then we wish them well and tell them good luck. We’re not going to spend our energy and resources to simply create another fish selling portal. We’re interested in that broader change that CSFs create.

### **Example #2 Community Supported Bakeries**

Community Supported Bakeries (CSB) reveal a number of practices that emulate Community Supported Agriculture methods and goals. CSBs support the consumption of less processed organically grown foods, and to make consumers aware of different eating choices. By gathering consumers together into membership communities that provide advance funding, CSBs lower costs for producers. A key example is the ability to use advance payments to make discounted bulk purchases of ingredients. By knowing who is buying, how many to bake for, and having advance financing, CSBs reduce waste and discards occurring from overproduction. CSBs have the advantage of being able to form out of an existing retail or wholesale bakery or convert to one if the CSB is not

successful. Like Community Supported Agriculture, some CSBs also “mix systems”, combining CSA exchanges with wholesale accounts, catering jobs, and direct sales at farmers markets. Most CSBs appear to have been self-organized by producers, originating independently, following a combination of expansion and hierarchical diffusion trends. Currently there are approximately 12 CSBs total which are located in a variety of regions around the U.S., with the largest concentrations in the Northeast and Pacific Northwest. They are not networked and do not draw on any common advocacy or support organizations. Common CSB share periods or “seasons” are around 12 weeks, with shorter and longer options as some CSBs.

One CSB owner/operator I interviewed lived in a mid-sized town in the Pacific Northwest and had operated her CSB for five years. Baking was a career change for her and she started the CSB without professional experience as a baker. A leap of faith she described as “scary”. Friends helped in the beginning and were supportive as her initial members. She contacted several CSA farms, put brochures in share boxes, and first rented kitchen space in a downtown senior center. She described her start up costs as very low. Eventually, she moved to her own space, a garage she renovated into a colorful, fully licensed kitchen, with friends providing small loans for the expansion. Though she began the enterprise solely based on the revenue from the CSB members, she began to sell in other venues as well. She spoke of the reciprocal role she had developed with local vegetable CSA operators at the farmer markets, “we talk each other up”, and mentioned she was a member of a mushroom CSA herself. She engaged some members to host pick-up sites at their houses (a practice also used by some CSAgriculture projects).

This CSBaker described her biggest challenge as “customer outreach and support”, but claimed that 60% of members sign up again after their initial membership period. At five years running this CSB had a demonstrated longevity. Despite ongoing challenges To attract and keep members, balance work and leisure time, she expressed pride in the Enterprise, saying “I never guessed how connected I would get in the community” and that she was known as someone who took a leap of faith to found her community supported enterprise: “people feel inspired because I quit the job I didn’t like to do this”.

I also spoke with the former operator of a short lived CSB in the Northeast. He and his partner had both worked on CSA farms prior to starting the CSB and had also been CSA member/shareholders. Prior to their CSB, they were aware of one other in the region, but did not appeal to that enterprise directly for guidance. Their CSB focused on selling only gluten-free goods, a consumer need that was not being readily filled in their community at the time. They also started with a few friends first. As they were starting out they saw the CSB model as a way to help pre-buy the ingredients without needing much of their own money. They too saw the model as a way to reduce waste: “...when you are starting a business you’re wasting a lot of ingredients testing stuff, or we’d be delivering to stores and bring too much and have to buy it back... so it was a good way to know exactly how much to bake and not have as much waste.” The member supported foundation of the enterprise started off well enough, but as they made adaptations and provided other options, consumers chose more traditional consumption systems and sites.

Once we ... started distributing to local grocery stores, and people decided that was a much better option to get our food—so we stopped doing the traditional CSB model where people would fill out an order form ...” (and) started allowing them to come to the farmer’s market and getting whatever they wanted.

There were able to sell much more product at the other venues, but at retail stores “their margins were much lower”. He mentioned the limitations of value added products potentially not appealing to everyone (“some people don’t like English muffins”), whereas unprepared food can be utilized any way the consumer wants. Ultimately, the surveys they conducted revealed a lack of attachment by the consumers to the CSB model and they phased it out: “I guess we weren’t prepared for people to say—“I’d rather just buy this at the grocery store” and I think that is what we heard”.

One interpretation of this Community Supported Enterprise is that it had failed.

Consumers had spoken loud and clear and they preferred more convenient and familiar buying options (which necessitated that the producers wholesale rather than sell direct.) Even more obvious was the short-lived nature of the project. But this former baker’s reflections did not ring of discouragement. Rather he praised the model but blamed the narrowness of their gluten-free product line.

“We did the traditional CSB model about 9 months” What I really enjoyed about it was that we knew how much money was coming in, and knew exactly what we needed to make each week and I really enjoyed all the aspects of it. There were a

lot more things that made sense about it. The limitation was that we were doing “a niche of a niche in a small town”, is what we always said.

If all CSEs were short lived or unprofitable, of course this would cast doubt on CSE as a being any kind of larger movement or viable alternative to capitalist enterprise. But the demise of the 9 month old CSBakery is to some extent merely a demise on capitalocentric terms. That this particular CSE couldn't grow and reap profits like a successful capitalist business would be expected to do does not erase the newly acquired knowledge that “a lot more things that made sense about it”. CSEs are enterprises but can also be sites of transformational experiences that generate and test new economic identities.

### **Example #3 Community Supported Yoga**

Community Supported Yoga (CSY) constitutes a significant departure from CSEs that sell material products. The enterprise of yoga has teachers and students. Yoga teachers provide the service of leading students in a class or “practice”. Students receive this service as both a form of physical training and physical therapy. Yoga teachers also impart knowledge of the body, mind and spirit. So, CSY is an economic activity that falls under both tertiary and quaternary categories. Moving away from the primary economic sector that CSA and CSFisheries operate within, and beyond the secondary sector that includes CSBakeries, I examine Community Supported Yoga.

A recent study shows that as many as 20 million Americans practice yoga,

a figure describing a nearly 5 million jump in 5 years (Yoga Journal 2012). Therefore, the emergence of Community Supported Yoga as a replicable economic model in a high growth industry shows potential for this CSE to reach a large audience. To date, however, there are only a handful of programs referring to themselves as Community Supported Yoga and they are not networked. I offer here a case study that involved the founding of a Community Supported Yoga program in the Northeast in 2010. A yoga teacher was compelled to create the new enterprise model when the capitalist fitness club franchise she was teaching at closed suddenly. She described an initial process of building a sense of connection to the fitness club. Then revealed that she had falsely assumed that her labor had actually earned her some authority in the business.

I worked for a local gym for seven years. I opened the place up. I was the first teacher they hired. ... I consulted with them to get the program up and running and how to set the schedule up and props they'd need. Tried to set the tone of a really good program. And it was a really good program.

After teaching several years and experiencing some challenging disputes over scheduling issues, she described a bitter revelation of accepting the fact that her well-being would never be central in this capitalist model.

I realized I didn't have a voice in that organization. I really didn't have a voice... they weren't interested in hearing anything you had to say to them, even if it would save their tanking business.

She then described the beginnings of a collaboration between herself and one her students, who had become a friend and informal promoter of her teaching. The friend suggested they could use her existing credibility and popularity as a yoga teacher and “set up a different program under different premises”. The friend explained further.

I was observing a number of things...people would say, "I hope the gym doesn't close, because what will we do? ...I also noticed...that when people arrived in class, they always put themselves in the same spot, and they felt very passionate about their spot. And so, all of these ideas started to come together and I thought, "It's not that people want to go to any yoga teacher; they want to go to *their* teacher, and they want *their* spot. So how do we make this affordable?

When the fitness club closed they “started to talk about this idea of Community Supported Yoga that would be modeled after a CSA”. A significant challenge that had been recurring during her years teaching in capitalist gyms came in two forms. Some gyms only offered a set wage—thus no financial incentive to grow or improve the class. Other gyms offered payment only on a per-student basis—thus no financial security. In the per-student format, teachers received a percentage of each students per class payment but no guaranteed wage, so if only a few students showed up to class, the teacher was still obligated to teach, but might make little or no profit. In addition to these unsatisfactory financial arrangements, neither system seemed to facilitate a strong commitment on the

part of students. She spoke of how the community supported model evolved and addressed these interrelated challenges.

We invited all of the studentship that had previously been studying with me to be a stakeholder in creating this new venue and this new community, and this new model. And people went for it, which was so exciting. And that was probably the biggest influence was the CSA model...of course it's a little bit different in that I'm not growing a crop. But we took the idea of people mutually investing in a program so that both the teachers and the students were going to benefit. So that you didn't have a teacher in a situation where you never know who's going to show up to class and there's no commitment of studentship on that end. And so you're just always having to be the one recalibrating and being flexible to whoever shows up.

Establishing the CSY required shifting from a format that had prioritized notions of consumer convenience (students could pay for and drop in at will to any class) to a new format that emphasized consumer commitment (sign up for one month). The CSY model would cultivate dedication to the program, to the practice and to the teacher. This is similar to a CSA in several regards. Pre-payment helps foster a deeper connection between consumers and the farm, CSA distributions create a weekly routine for the consumption of fresh produce, and members become attached to "their" farmers. The CSY teacher/co-founder remarked that "...I think in order to excel in the practice of yoga you need a modicum of commitment." In fact, she identified two levels of

commitment that the CSY needed to cultivate: commitment to studentship and financial commitment. The teacher and her student/business consultant came up with a simple formula that took into account both producer income and consumer price. Numbers of students were multiplied by various membership fees until they arrived on an affordable price (less than market value) and a minimum number of students needed to make the plan viable<sup>1</sup>. Making the membership community more inclusive was an important goal and thus keeping price of the yoga affordable was a fundamental concern. The CSY teacher explained.

When I talk to a lot of people it's like the price point really does matter. It's not just like, well, if you value this, then you're going to do it. I used to think that way. But the bottom line is like, no. It's like people just don't have the money.

Eventually, the two co-founders of this CSY also came to adopt a strategy of generosity, and cultivated an environment of flexibility. Members could lend their membership to spouses, relatives, roommates, and a "bring-a-friend-for-free" policy was created to allow each existing member to invite friends or family to try the program. This kept the official membership identity intact, but helped attract new members and mitigated a sense of the membership becoming too insular or exclusive (CSA farms have long held a somewhat similar practice of allowing a person to buy one share and then to distribute it amongst neighbors, friends or roommates as they saw fit).

This CSY promoted some level of flexibility and control for members. Sometimes this resulted in frustrations for the teacher who needed to continually restate some of the programs firmer policies. However, the environment of economic possibility that resulted from this flexibility could also be generative. This is something that has been observed at CSA as well. Research has demonstrated that CSA produces an economically fertile environment in which experimentation and diverse economic activity is encouraged and facilitated (White 2013). Examination of the CSY case study reveals similar dynamics in which this model also grows economic diversity. Bartering arrangements, as often observed at CSA (White 2013) have also emerged at the CSY.

One CSY student who was self-employed as a body worker described how she wanted to take more than one class per week but felt she couldn't afford it. Eventually she arranged a trade of one yoga class for one session of body work. She noted, how "a certain level of self-worth" is needed to propose a non-monetary exchange of labor, but implied that the CSY model helped validate that self-worth. The arrangement began with financial motives, but after two years of this barter, broader professional and social benefits also emerged. The student explained that:

...I really have been without money for years, without much money, like enough, but not quite enough, ... I started paying for (one yoga class) once a week, Then I was like, "this is really good!", she's got another morning class, I can do that but I can't really afford another one... maybe she would be willing to do an exchange?"...that's sort of my mentality and you do have to have a certain

level of self-worth to say I have something worth exchanging and it has to fit the situation. Currently she and I have very nice paralleling information, so I use what she teaches me in my body and also on my bodywork clients, and she uses what I help her with in her body and in her yoga classes so it's a very synergistic exchange.

Other diverse economic activity which took place in association with the CSY included the teacher allowing her friend/business consultant to take classes for free. They didn't need to co-own the business, but the teacher wanted to compensate her friend for the valuable advice and web design she continued to provide. Some additional diverse economic activity consisted of occasional rides to or from class which the teacher called upon her members to provide, and in which they invariably were willing to do so. Overall, the structure of the CSY, its monetary and non-monetary benefits and capacity for relationship building were deeply satisfying to its founder/teacher.

For the first time in my whole life I have no problem making good money. It's like this is a new experience. ... (in my past) somehow there was also an inner-reluctance to thrive financially because I feel like I would be doing it at the expense of other people, or at the expense of making my services available to people with less means. With this model I feel great about the money I earn. I feel great about the service of teaching that I provide. And I feel great about the price point that people are getting, because it is so affordable.

Without them and their monthly membership, it wouldn't happen the way it's happening now. ...I need the membership like a farm needs the investment. They need the capital ahead to buy the seeds and whatever other products they need to develop and build their business. I need the commitment of the studentship to pay my rent and to pay my bills and to feed my family.

After the first year of operating and teaching via her CSY, the founder was asked to give a short public presentation encapsulating her story of starting the CSY. The forum was titled "Occupy...Disrupt...Reinvent" and featured local entrepreneurs, designers and thinkers. Her presentation concluded with a story of how the members of her CSY program came together and pooled their resources to give her a paid vacation. Her story provided an example of how notions of "community" might seem highly romanticized or unsubstantial, but community could in fact be brought into being and put into action via an empowered membership.

Last summer, a lot of members in my program gave their August monthly payment so I could take a paid vacation, and in 16 years teaching yoga, this was definitely my first paid vacation. Could you imagine people contributing extra money to the CEO of Target so they could take a paid vacation?"

Motivated by the programs initial success, the two co-founders of this CSY made additional efforts to promote and proliferate the model. They found this a tough sell. Though there was interest in the new model, there was also resistance. In one instance

they met with a group consisting of a studio owner and several affiliated teachers who were intrigued about the model. After lengthy discussions, and follow up discussions, the group decided not to adopt the model. The CSY teacher reflected on how difficult it was both to clarify how the new model was structured and to convince the other teachers it would work. She recounted that the studio owner “wanted all the changes” but was “attached” to the existing format and her leadership role.

Follow up interviews with the owner of the CSY, revealed her evolving perceptions of how to most effectively manage the enterprise. After three years of running the program, membership had declined somewhat and it was clear that continual outreach to gain new members was needed to maintain and grow the numbers to keep meeting her financial goals. Aside from the drop in members/profits and the extra time it took to work with a few high maintenance members, she was very pleased with the model. The CSE she’d built had started as an experimental safety net, then quickly evolved into a transformative economic experience, and over the years had fulfilled long-held aspirations to “work less and make more” while providing a very affordable and highly appreciated service.

#### **Example #4 Community Supported Art**

Artists, like farmers, often find themselves deeply undervalued in the U.S. economy. Lacking a steady predictable income and often going without support systems like health care, artists resemble the self-exploiting CSA farmers who show up repeatedly in alternative food network literature (Pilgeram 2011, Galt 2011, Lass et al 2003). Unlike the CSEs which provide new contexts for individual entrepreneurs, Community

Supported Art programs have emerged from collaborations of artist advocacy organizations, artists, and fledgling art collectors (rather than from individual artists acting on their own). The artist service organizations that have helped pioneer Community Supported Art (CSArt) are charged with addressing the needs of communities of artists and see CSE as a rich concept with many possibilities. Their interpretation of CSE has been to select groups of artists who can collectively produce larger quantities of artworks for shareholders.

Some of the benefits for artists who are selected to participate in CSArt programs are very tangible (e.g. guaranteed pay for a set amount of production) while many other benefits are less quantifiable. Exposure to new audiences, connections to galleries and to potential employers are some of the positive “ripple effects” that interviewees spoke of. Other opportunities for CSArtists include the opportunity to try new creative methods and use new materials. Noteworthy advantages for CSArt shareholders include a welcoming, affordable way to learn about and support local artists and collect their work. With many CSArt shareholders coming from “outside” of existing local art scenes, their level of intimidation in becoming directly engaged with art and artists was significant (this was mentioned repeatedly by interviewees). As observed in other CSEs profiled here, perhaps the most important contribution of CSArt programs are the deeply meaningful producer-consumer, consumer-consumer, and producer-producer relationships they help cultivate.

In recent years, after much discourse within some local and regional arts advocacy groups, the idea of transplanting the CSA model into the arts culture kept sprouting up,

and seemed to offer a variety of hopeful methods for both making art and engaging with it. One staff member recalled how members of her organization and partnering arts organizations felt.

There's got to be a better way of connecting people with artists...that isn't about artists donating their work, a model that actually supports artists and the community...how do we work on that market building exposure piece, in a way that is also supportive of artists, and that values their work and that doesn't kind of teach people to undervalue artists work?

In Minnesota, this notion of repurposing the CSA model to link a community of art supporters to a group of local artists was hammered out into a well structured plan. Two arts organizations collaborated to select 9 local artists, and have them each make 50 pieces of art for 50 CSArt member/shareholders (hence, each shareholder would get 9 different pieces). Shares would cost \$300. Artists would be paid \$1,000. An effective promotional campaign drew attention to the new model, and strategic outreach was done to link local food advocates with the new local art enterprise. The 50 shares sold out quickly. After several successful "seasons" they decided to create and disseminate guidelines so that others could try out the model in new cultural and geographic contexts. One of CSArts co-founders explained some of the strategies to disseminating the model. In particular they hoped to associate the idea directly to its point of inspiration, avoid artist exploitation, and make allies of food and art communities.

We have the toolkit and when we talk with people, we have kind of three core values that we feel pretty strongly about and other than that everything else is kind of up for grabs in terms of adaptation. So the three things are:

-that you call it community supported art, because I think that helps people understand the model much more easily, than if you call it something else

-that the money goes back to support the artists, that it isn't a fundraiser for your organization

-and that you build a real relationship with your local food community, that you use it as a way of building your own overall relationship between the art community and the food community

Since the CSArt program in Minnesota was founded, CSArt programs have sprung up around the country. Many of these have been established with guidance and encouragement from the groups in Minnesota and from their CSArt replication kit (approximately 40 CSArt programs have been established in the U.S. at the time of this writing (Springboard for the Arts 2013).

While CSArt remained vibrant in Minnesota and in many of the various areas where it had spread, some other communities had trouble replicating it. One CSArt organizer

in the midwest recounted that even though the public was excited by the project, that at first “no artists submitted their work!” an occurrence she described as...”infuriating”. But with time, the project’s challenges became provocative insights into artist motivations and reservations. “What was so frustrating about this was that the public who’d heard about it could not wait to buy the shares... I did not anticipate getting artists would be a problem but it turned out to be less engaging to them than I thought”. This situation demonstrates the highly subjective fluctuations of valuing that artists experience over time, and the inherent tensions between worthiness, needs and remuneration. Besides being frustrated, this CSArt organizer also expressed being stimulated and enlightened by her analysis.

The thing that’s so interesting about this is that you have to really look at the \$1,000 stipend in a variety of ways, for young artists a thousand dollars feels like a pile of money, so they’re very excited for that piece, but for older artists they break it down and say: “Really? I haven’t made a 20 dollar piece of art since I was in college.

A variety of positive ripple effects eventually came out of this CSArt project, which continued successfully after its first year.

Community supported enterprise by definition engages consumers in a way that requires more investment and encourages more inquiry. With CSArt, organizers have developed a sensitivity to the feelings of member/consumers that they observe as art-neophytes,

“intimidated” and trying to orient themselves in unfamiliar landscapes. Akin to the CSA member confronted by the unknown vegetable, The CSArt member is often perceived as tentative but ultimately willing to try something new. A CSArt organizer in a large northeast urban center notes:

With the CSA agriculture, a lot of people will often get vegetables that they don't know what to do with, like they get rhubarb and they're like: “what's this?”. We have some of that with the art too. People are like, “I don't understand this”. The idea is that they would get to know it a little bit more. Even if they don't get it instantly. They'll begin to understand what the art is over time...we like it when people are like: “what is this?” because then there's a conversation.

Another CSArt program coordinator operating in a lower density midwestern area felt similarly and stated how important she felt it had been to tell the members that it was OK for them to “not love every piece of art they got and to trust their own reactions to it”. Over time, she learned to make space at the CSArt distributions for each artist to be able to speak publically about their work and said this had powerful impacts: “...some art that was interesting but not really outstanding became unbelievable after the artists talked about what had inspired them”. Artists drew on a broad range of personal experience, ethnic and cultural narratives and interpretations, and used a variety of mediums from sculpted beewax and braided prairie grass, to ceramics and coffee bean sacks. As artists spoke about their work in public, sometimes “their knees were shaking” and they were

“poorly prepared to talk about their work”, but it was still “great for them to have to explain it.”

CSArt moves into other interesting new territory, especially with regards to race and ethnicity. Most Community Supported Agriculture enterprises have produced and perpetuated membership demographics that are mostly white and that have made whiteness a normative condition of participation (Guthman 2008). CSArt programs have in several cases been able to welcome significant diversity into their producer groups. One such CSArt program was started expressly to offer ethnic folk arts drawing on the work of immigrant artists or rediscovered heritage arts being produced by familial descendents from a broad range of cultures and geographies.

Another potential benefit of the emergence of CSEs is the possibility for new people to become aware of CSAgriculture and other CSEs at the same time. One artist selected to participate in a CSArt, admitted that “I have heard the term CSAgriculture, but I don’t know the specifics and what it entails.” This suggests the ability for new CSEs to attract audiences that may be new to the concepts, keeping the pool of CSE participants active and expanding. Some CSArt pioneers have been able to reflect on the exclusivity and barriers to engagement that the art world has produced. They recognize CSArt as a chance to enlarge access to that world. One CSArt organizer attempted to explain this past, in which efforts to seek more respect for art and artists had become a limiting factor, “...we made very clear definitions about who could be an artist and that excluded a lot of people, and in that quest for validation we sort of lost our way in terms of relevance.”.

While some CSArt projects reviewed for this study featured pools of mostly white artists, others featured highly diverse groups with artists from Hong Kong, Laos, the Phillipines, Morocco, Panama, as well as a variety of artists with Palestinian American, African American, Asian American backgrounds. Guthman has written about race and CSA, and calls on whites “to open up the space” to others for creating a more just and ecological way of providing food (Guthman 2008). The fact that CSArt organizers are making some efforts “to open up the space” is being noticed and appreciated. As one artist told me of her participation in CSArt, “undiscovered community artists have been underserved and I am enjoying the upward trend to support us.” This artist also praised the relationships that participating in the CSArt had fostered.

The group of artists they put together was wonderful. I made some life-long connections with artists at different levels of their business growth. The range of personalities among a small group of nine was wild. Having nine of us with very individual, but common goals (learning and sharing together) created a community for us.

CSArt, like the other CSEs examined in this paper, are exhibiting diverse economic activity. This follows the research which shows that CSAgriculture has been able to cultivate diverse economic activity in many ways (White 2013). One CSArt organizer mentioned how one of the artists he’d worked with initiated the idea of having each CSArt artist make extra shares for the other artists: a supplemental level of production, distribution, and consumption manifested in a non-monetary exchange.

One of our artists said that she really wanted one (a share of all the art works), then she suggested that the artists make nine extra shares for the other artists. Sort of like a gift to each other and everybody was very enthusiastic about that.... So all the artists also got a share. That was a way of paying them also. ...so they all have the art in their house. (this was in addition to the cash honoraria they received)....It really was a very creative piece of programming. It was great because it was creative in itself but then it left a lot of avenues open for people to think of new things like that, there was space for suggestions like that...

This was a meaningful example of producer-producer relationships occurring at CSArt. And another CSArt organizer also spoke of the powerful producer-consumer relationships that she observed were being created through CSArt.

I'm really moved by the fact how many artists say to me that part of what they love about the program is that while they're making the work, they know people have already bought it, and the idea that they are making something that they already know is going to be in someone's home, is sort of a different experience than making work and then seeing if anyone wants it,...that trust and buy-in by a group of people is meaningful for the artist.

Taking a wider perspective on the CSArt movement, one of the Minnesota CSArt organizers summarized the importance of not trying to manage the movement too closely.

The conscious effort to allow freedom in the replication of each new CSArt program was vital to its healthy growth. This view on the role of advocacy organizations not being too heavy handed was also expressed by a leader of the Community Supported Fishery movement. The positive associations that they maintained to the legacy of CSAgriculture they felt ensured some level of integrity for the future of their CSE. Lastly, they intimated that Community Supported Enterprises seemed to be somewhat immune to co-optation , because the profitability demonstrated by them is modest.

If we tried to have the control it certainly wouldn't be able to spread as quickly as it has, it's only by letting go of it that it has been able to go so many places... the reputation of community supported agriculture is part of why it's been able to grow so rapidly without really very many problems...because (participants) do feel an obligation to the idea and to their community and... structurally it's designed to be self-sustaining, but no one's going to get rich doing this so that also keeps it so that the people doing it are the right people (laughs). (Not sure how that sounded she rephrases her point) It would be a very strange thing to do if you didn't really believe in it.

## **Conclusion**

This paper explores the transplanting of the CSA model, using Community Supported Enterprise (CSE) as an umbrella term for the offshoots of CSA. Though CSEs are

emerging in a diverse range of sectors, there are unifying elements under which this heterogeneity can be viewed as a whole. Like Community Supported Agriculture, Community Supported Enterprise engages consumers as investors who pay in advance thereby creating some level of consumer commitment. This commitment is then leveraged by producers or producer advocates (support organizations) in the form of buying ingredients, renting facilities, paying stipends, etc. This is a structural commonality that appears to be present in all CSEs. Another unifying element, but one that takes on many diverse iterations is the building of relationships (which I observed more specifically as camaraderies) between producers and producers, consumers and consumers and producers and consumers. These relationships create opportunities for CSE participants to form new visions of economy. Thinking about, proposing, negotiating, and initiating a wide range of diverse economic activity in association with CSE.

I've investigated how CSE's are putting the fundamental principles and systems of CSA into practice. In particular, looking at the positive outcomes of the localized relationships fostered via CSEs, mentioned above. Structurally, these relationships have taken place in the form of bartering, volunteering, asking friends to become members or offer small loans, etc. More intangibly, these relationships are creating space for CSE participants (especially producers) to rethink "abusive" economic relationships and feelings of being "undervalued" by market systems or capitalist employers. These relationships have allowed not just critical reflection but many positive revelations documented such as the

yoga teacher who expressed that “For the first time in my whole life I have no problem making good money...and I feel great about the service of teaching that I provide”, or the artist who felt “the group of artists...was wonderful. I made some life-long connections with artists at different levels of their business growth”. These relationships are providing participants chances for economic reflection and action. To make a start at pursuing these notions I’ve sampled a small cross-section of Community Supported Enterprises: Community Supported Fisheries, Community Supported Bakeries, Community Supported Yoga, and Community Supported Art programs.

The nature of CSE, like CSA before it is that its initiators bestow upon themselves the designation of being a community supported enterprise. Like CSA, CSE has no strict definitions, no certification, no licensing (White 2013). You are a CSE if you say you are. These soft-designations of CSE may prove to be epistemologically troubling to researchers in their quests to understand, experience, analyze, and organize data from studying CSE. The slipperiness of a what a CSE is or could be may also be troubling to some CSE participants (like the Community Supported Fisheries participants) who feel there must be certain requisite ethical values, mutual risk-sharing, or commitments made between consumers and producers. However, as Community Supported Agriculture co-founder Jan VanderTuin commented with regard to official standards for CSA, “the thing about standards is—how are you going to enforce them?”. Vandertuin’s comment speaks neither for or against standards but helps us consider whether CSE should be more concerned with evolving and reflecting or policing itself?

So where to next? What might be some signposts pointing towards further research into Community Supported Enterprises? The autonomy to define and replicate Community Supported Agriculture has been a core aspect of that movement. Therefore, I suggest that one course of research should be to examine how CSEs define themselves and build on networks between similar and different CSEs. At present, the CSE sectors that have grown and spread more robustly, such as Community Supported Fisheries and Community Supported Art have done so with the aid of advocacy NGOs, who help promote the CSEs and facilitate the sharing of knowledge and best practices. Will other CSEs be able to develop similar levels of outside organizational assistance to unify efforts and build awareness? Another investigation into CSEs would be to ask whether or not producers are making adequate incomes from their CSE. Important CSA research has revealed that CSA farmers (who otherwise embrace the CSA model) admit that CSA has not provided them with adequate financial security (Lass, et al, Pilgeram 2011, Galt 2013). Further research into CSE should ask: how are CSE producers (often working on very small scales) addressing their own needs for financial security? How can transparency (in particular, the interactive sharing of financial reports) between CSE producers and consumers become a more significant element in CSE?

Another pathway for future research on CSE would be to investigate it as a feminist economic model. Recent research on CSA has revealed a feminist economics at work; women farmers are highly represented in CSA and researchers have noted women's empowerment and caring practice as foundational to many women-run CSAs (Jarosz 2011, Wells and Gradwell 2001). Though the research presented in this paper does not

scientifically measure or quantify women's presence in other CSEs per se, this overview of CSE suggests an undeniably strong presence of women amongst CSEs leaders, advocates, and participants. With this in mind, there may be some gendered elements to the formation, replication, and motives of certain CSEs. Finally, one other key topic for future research on CSE comes to mind: participant diversity. CSA participant demographics reveal a mostly white, upper middle class population involved in CSA (Schnell 2007, Guthman 2008) and in alternative food networks in general (Slocum 2007). As mentioned earlier in this paper, some CSEs seem to be actively widening this demographic. Future research into CSE should examine more deeply how issues of ethnicity, race, and class exist in CSE. One productive inquiry might be to identify examples of CSE's that have been more diverse and inclusive, and investigate how this has been achieved.

## CONCLUSION

Community Supported Agriculture, since its origins, has offered an opportunity for its many participants to rethink and often rework their economic practices. In contrast to a world view where capitalism is normative, fixed and inevitable, CSA presents a world-view (or at least a microcosm) of the economy as diverse, pliable, open to change. In its rejection of the methods and mentality of industrialized agriculture, CSA opens up views to new economic pathways. CSA foregrounds possibility, diversity, unpredictability and collaboration. This is in stark contrast to industrialized agriculture which embodies the tenets of McDonaldisation, a ruthless hyper-rationality centered on: efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control.

CSA exemplifies the growing interest in alternatives to capitalism and provides a space to experiment with other economic ways of being. These experiments have even led to the creation of other community supported enterprises that move beyond farmscapes and sometimes beyond foodscapes. CSA has provided both a conceptual framework and practical opportunities for its participants to initiate economic interventions within households and communities. In some cases, economic interventions made by advocacy organizations have been able to scale up CSEs and develop strategies for expansion of certain community supported enterprises on regional and national scales (e.g. the NGO's mentioned here that have helped grow community supported fisheries and community supported arts programs). Community Supported Enterprises including CSA, do not represent a singular alternative to capitalist enterprise, but they enrich an already diverse

economy and prioritize vital needs around equity, collaboration, environmental stewardship and social responsibility that go largely unaddressed within capitalism.

In this study, I have provided three related examinations of Community Supported Agriculture. In the first chapter, I have demonstrated that Community Supported Agriculture is a fertile and productive site for cultivating and promoting diverse economic activity that increases mutual support and interdependency. This chapter inventories some of the specific ways that CSA both inspires and accommodates economic innovation and intervention on individual and systemic scales.

In the second chapter, I described the evolution and proliferation of CSA, theorizing that CSA has made beneficial use of an unusual branding process that promotes autonomy *and* collectivity. This branding process allows myriad CSAs to make use of a singular powerful name “Community Supported Agriculture” (and the abbreviation “CSA”). Initially, the branding of CSA drew on some basic unifying sensibilities (often linked to concepts introduced by Rudolf Steiner) while still allowing CSAs to endlessly adapt their principles, methods, and scales of operation. In this chapter, I examined the notion of who controls CSA, and presented data that suggests that control of CSA is decentralized and exercised in countless ways by its many participants. CSA is not certified, unlike “organic” or “Fair Trade” and so designation or enforcement of what CSA is--or is not--remains subjective and contested. The anti-branding of CSA is also theorized in this chapter, and is represented by the absence of a hierarchical structure to CSA, a lack of headquarters or central profit center, and by a lack of rules, logo and trademark. The anti-

branding of CSA also draws on an activist spirit that celebrates CSAs grassroots nature and rejects corporate farming and food systems.

Lastly in this second chapter, I examined another dynamic of the branding process in which a range of mythologies have been created consciously and less consciously by CSA promoters and participants. Sometimes these mythologies refer to aspirations that CSA has achieved (providing fresh, local, organic food, more meaningful connections between farmers and eaters, and a greater awareness and appreciation for small scale agriculture). In other cases, these mythologies represent idealized assumptions that CSA is adequately profitable for farmers and brings them financial security, when in fact, research suggests that the contrary is often true.

In the third chapter, I described the emergence of CSA offshoots, non-agricultural Community Supported Enterprises (CSE) that have modeled themselves after CSA and have forwarded many of CSAs founding principles and practices. Here, I examine a range of diverse economic activity occurring at CSE, much of which mirrors the activities I documented at CSA earlier in the first chapter. In looking at Community Supported Enterprise, I've offered qualitative data which speaks to the transformative potential of CSE to help its participants explore new economic identities, and rethink their conceptions of value and worth within personal and communal contexts. Like CSA, non-agricultural CSE represents a space for autonomous economic experimentation, and a broad range of possibilities for forwarding more ethical,

sustainable practices. Relationships fostered at CSEs also build camaraderie and greater understanding amongst producers and consumers.

Taken as a whole, the three parts of this study provide encouraging documentation of CSA and CSE as vehicles for positive social change via economic rethinking and agency. Several elements of my study suggest pathways for future research. One of these is the educational aspects of CSA and CSE. During the research process, I explored ways that CSA uses a form of experiential education to stimulate economic experimentation (see Figure B2 in Appendices). Following Kolb's basic model of experiential education, CSA appears to use the same dynamic flow in which concrete experience (participating in a CSA), is followed by reflective observation (periods between food distributions and during off-season), followed by abstract conceptualization (rethinking economic possibilities), and finally active experimentation (enacting new economic practices). Though not expressed directly in the completed research presented here, I see the experiential education model as a useful framework for future research on CSA. In particular, further inquiry into how CSA utilizes experiential education to stimulate understanding and interest in economic alternatives is well worth pursuing. As stated in the introduction of this dissertation, part of the legacy of capitalism is its tendency to narrow economic discourse by suppressing the questioning of hierarchical ownership, market valuing, and waged labor as a commodity. In effect, this keeps the most vulnerable participants of capitalist economy unaware of and disengaged from the more ethical and equitable economic possibilities that do exist and could be expanded. Participation in CSA and CSE is a way to learn more about economic

alternatives. CSA and CSE could be cultivated not just as a practice of economic diversity but in fact as an heuristic pedagogy that informs and involves participants in manifesting ethical economic diversity on an ongoing basis. This would be a significant rebuttal to the notion that “there is no alternative” to global capitalism.

Another element of my own research process that remained more subterranean rather than foregrounded was the use of some participatory action research (PAR) approaches. During my three plus years of field research, I was a member of one of the CSAs I was investigating, and was also on the board of directors of a land trust organization which partnered with my CSA. I also became a member of two Community Supported Fisheries for shorter “trial” periods, *and* my wife started a community supported yoga program. All this occurred during the data gathering period. In a variety of ways, the dynamics of community supported endeavors swirled all around me. Certainly, being an “insider” of sorts did offer another layer of insight into the inner workings of CSA and CSE. I also had close proximity to witnessing some of the accomplishments and challenges of creating and cultivating a true community based enterprise. Because I was a member of both organizations, I experienced various emotional responses (yearning, frustration and gratitude to name a few) to my own visions of how my CSA and its partner organization should be collaborating. These feelings occupied a parallel universe alongside the neutrally reflective process of my data gathering. As my investigation evolved, my orientation to it became focused on the multiplicity of CSA and CSE projects and subjects and veered away from the specificity of my own personal experiences as a participant. The completed study presented here, offers data collected by me (an informed, engaged

participant researcher), but is not an examination of my own experience. That's how it went for me—this time around. However, future research on the economics of CSA would be well served by incorporating more PAR inspired techniques such as collaborative research as well as auto-ethnography—especially if undertaken by CSA farm apprentices, or other less visible, less heard-from actors in other CSE projects. Such work would add valuable richness to the elusive but vital study of how we think and feel about our economic lives and how we put those thoughts and feelings into practice.

In final summary, this study: 1) identifies CSA as able to vibrantly produce diverse, ethically-motivated economic alternatives 2) demonstrates that autonomy and collectivity have been key underlying sources of inspiration and progress for CSA and 3) looks ahead to a new range of Community Supported Enterprises that are also producing diverse economic activity which benefits and transforms participants. In examining Community Supported Agriculture and its kindred Community Supported Enterprises, I offer this research as an example and as a testament that seeds of a new economy have germinated and are growing in our midst. We would do well to help them flourish.

## APPENDIX A

### PROFILES OF THE FIVE CSA PROJECTS STUDIED

#### CSA FARM PROFILES (circa 2013)

##### Massachusetts, USA

##### Simple Gifts Farm CSA

Amherst, MA



Year CSA founded: 2006

Number of CSA members: 275

Numbers of farmers: 2 full-time farmers, approx 3-5 apprentices,  
additional part-time workers

Size of farm: under 20 acres in production

Urban/Rural: Farm is urban, distribution is on-farm

Sliding Scale Pricing for CSA? Yes

Pick your own crops? Yes

The most distinguishing characteristic of Simple Gifts Farm CSA is its close proximity to residential areas of Amherst, MA. The 30+ acre farm is within a one-mile radius of an estimated 10,000 residents, making it a strikingly large urban/suburban CSA. Farmers Jeremy Barker-Plotkin and David Tepfer and their families live in homes they purchased adjacent to the farm. Simple Gifts Farm has a long-term lease on this historic in-town farm from a local land trust NGO, North Amherst Community Farm (NACF). NACF's goal is "to cultivate the farm as a unique community and natural resource". To this end, Simple Gifts and NACF co-host a variety of agriculture-related educational workshops and a popular annual harvest festival. Livestock (chickens, hogs, beef, lamb) on the farm helps maintain soil fertility, and meat is sold as an option to the vegetable shares.

**Brookfield Farm  
Amherst, MA**



Year CSA founded: 1986

Number of CSA members: 525

Number of farmers: 1 farm manager, 1 assistant farm manager, approx 3-4 apprentices, additional part-time workers

Size of farm: approx 30 acres in production (multiple properties)

Urban/Rural: Farm is rural, distribution is on-farm and at urban locations

Sliding Scale Pricing for CSA? No.

Pick-Your Own Crops? Yes

Brookfield Farm is one the oldest CSAs in the U.S., started soon after Indian Farm in MA, and Temple-Wilton Community Farm in NH. The farm has evolved significantly over its history. The CSA currently operates in partnership with a non-profit organization called Biodynamic Farmland Conservation Trust (BFCT). BFCT owns much of the farmland that the CSA produces on. This includes the core piece of farmland that is the site of large greenhouses and a central building that houses vegetable cleaning/sorting, a root cellar, administrative offices and CSA distribution. BFCT owns all the buildings and farm equipment. Instead of the farmers paying themselves, BFCT pays the farmers a salary—as employees. This payment system has helped provide more stable, higher wage employment for farmers. Brookfield has two geographic bases of CSA membership: suburban and rural members within the local Amherst area; and urban members in Boston. Brookfield offers many opportunities for CSA members to volunteer/participate at the farm (see photo of potato harvest, above right). Brookfield also hosts workshops for apprentices from other regional organic farms through the Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training (CRAFT) program (see photo, above left).

**Natural Roots CSA  
Conway, MA**



Year CSA founded: 2006

Number of CSA members: 190

Number of farmers: 2 farmers, 2 apprentices

Size of farm: under 10 acres in production

Urban/Rural: Farm is rural, distribution is on-farm

Sliding Scale Pricing for CSA? Limited number of low-income shares available

Pick your own crops? Yes

Natural Roots CSA is situated in a scenic rural valley, with a small river running between the distribution barn and the field crops. The farmers are a couple, David Fisher and Anna Maclay who live on the property with their children. They lease the land and a house from supportive landlords who also live on the property. CSA members are encouraged to spend time at the property in the u-pick areas, and wading in the river on hot days. Draft horses are used extensively in all manner of farm work, plowing, cultivating, hauling wagons, manure spreaders, etc. They actively promote their horse-powered operation praising the versatility, soil enrichment, energy efficiency, and low carbon footprint that the horses help provide. Natural Roots also participates in the educational CRAFT program offering popular workshops to apprentices on how to integrate horse-power within a farm (see photo above).

**Pioneer Valley Heritage Grains CSA  
Amherst/Shutesbury, MA**



Year CSA founded: 2009

Number of CSA members: 156

Size of farm: approx acres 20 acres (multiple properties) in production

Urban/Rural: CSA grains are grown at multiple sites. Distributions occur locally at a co-housing facility and in the Boston area in partnership with a CSA there.

Sliding Scale Pricing for CSA? No.

Pick your own crops? No

Ben and Adrié Lester started PVHG after they had opened a small bakery in Amherst, MA. They felt local grain production was a missing piece in the local food system. In response to increasing grain prices, they began the grain CSA as a step towards making the region more agriculturally self-sufficient and re-kindling interest in the history of local grain production. Since founding the CSA, they have presented many public interactive educational activities and field days such as visits to grain farms, meetings with local grain growers, and threshing and milling demonstrations. Free use of a grain mill is offered to CSA members at their bakery, which also acts as a hub of information for grain CSA members. (see photo above which shows grain processing/distribution).

**Common Wealth Cooperative CSA  
Greenfield, MA (distribution site)**



Year CSA founded: 1998

Number of CSA members: 60

Size of farm: multiple independent farms use a small portion of their total land to produce the farm shares for this cooperative CSA (currently, there are four participating farms ranging in size from 22 acres to 160 acres)

Urban/Rural: Production is rural, distribution is urban only

Sliding Scale Pricing for CSA? Yes

Pick your own crops? No

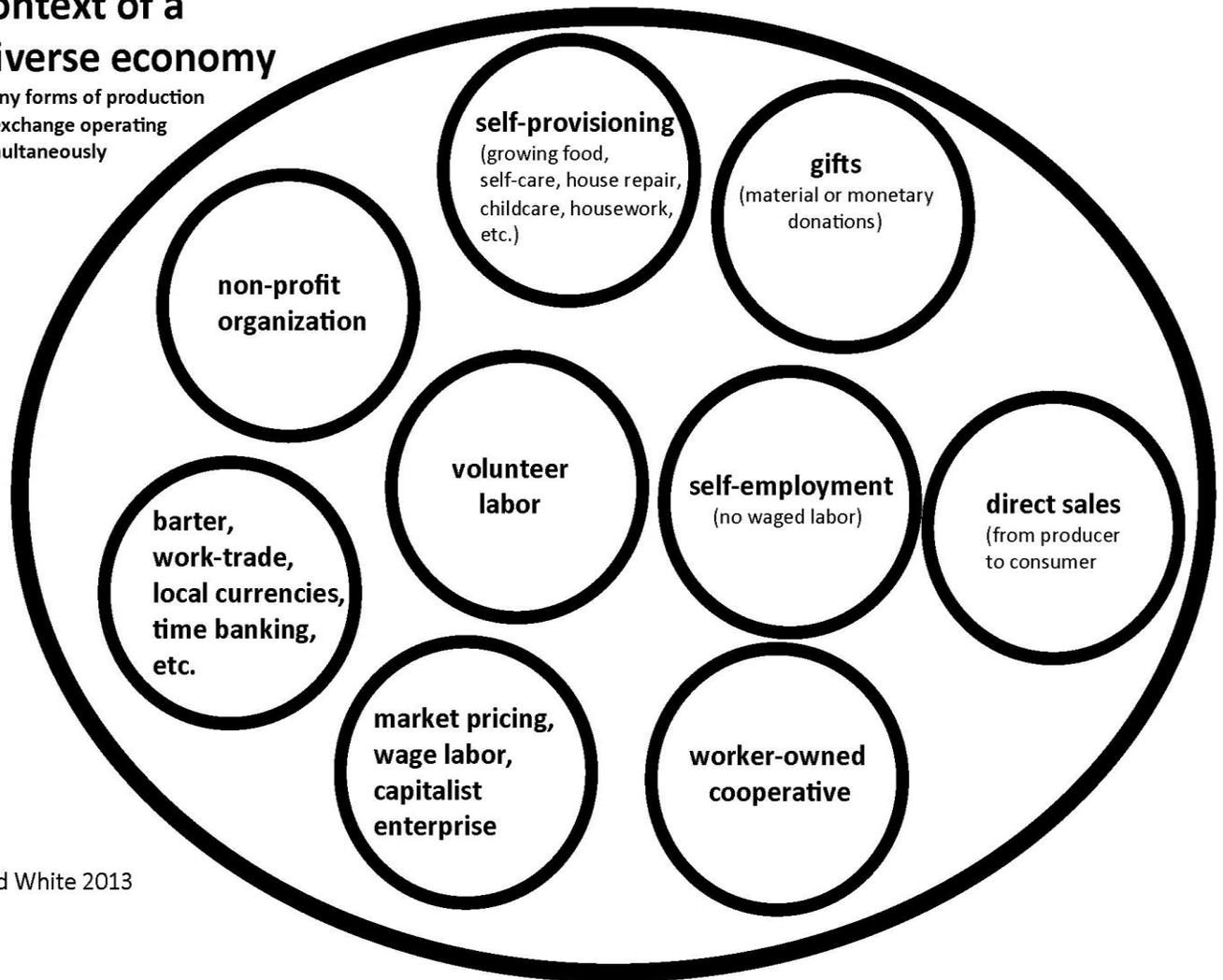
Common Wealth Cooperative CSA was founded as an effort to combine the production of several small farms into one CSA program. Thus there is no central production site, but there is a central distribution site located in a pedestrian walk just outside a local food co-op. The on-site combination of food co-op and CSA distribution is convenient for CSA members who can pick-up their produce and then go inside and purchase other items. Tables, shelves, etc. used for distribution are stored inside the co-op and the co-op purchases several shares to make some of their prepared foods. Participating farms have fluctuated somewhat since the founding of the CSA, but core participants are Common Wealth founder Rich Pascale, and Ryan and Sarah Voiland of Red Fire Farm (See photo above showing urbanized CSA distribution outside the food co-op).

## APPENDIX B

### TABLES AND FIGURES

#### context of a diverse economy

many forms of production  
& exchange operating  
simultaneously



Ted White 2013

Figure B.1: Context of a Diverse Economy

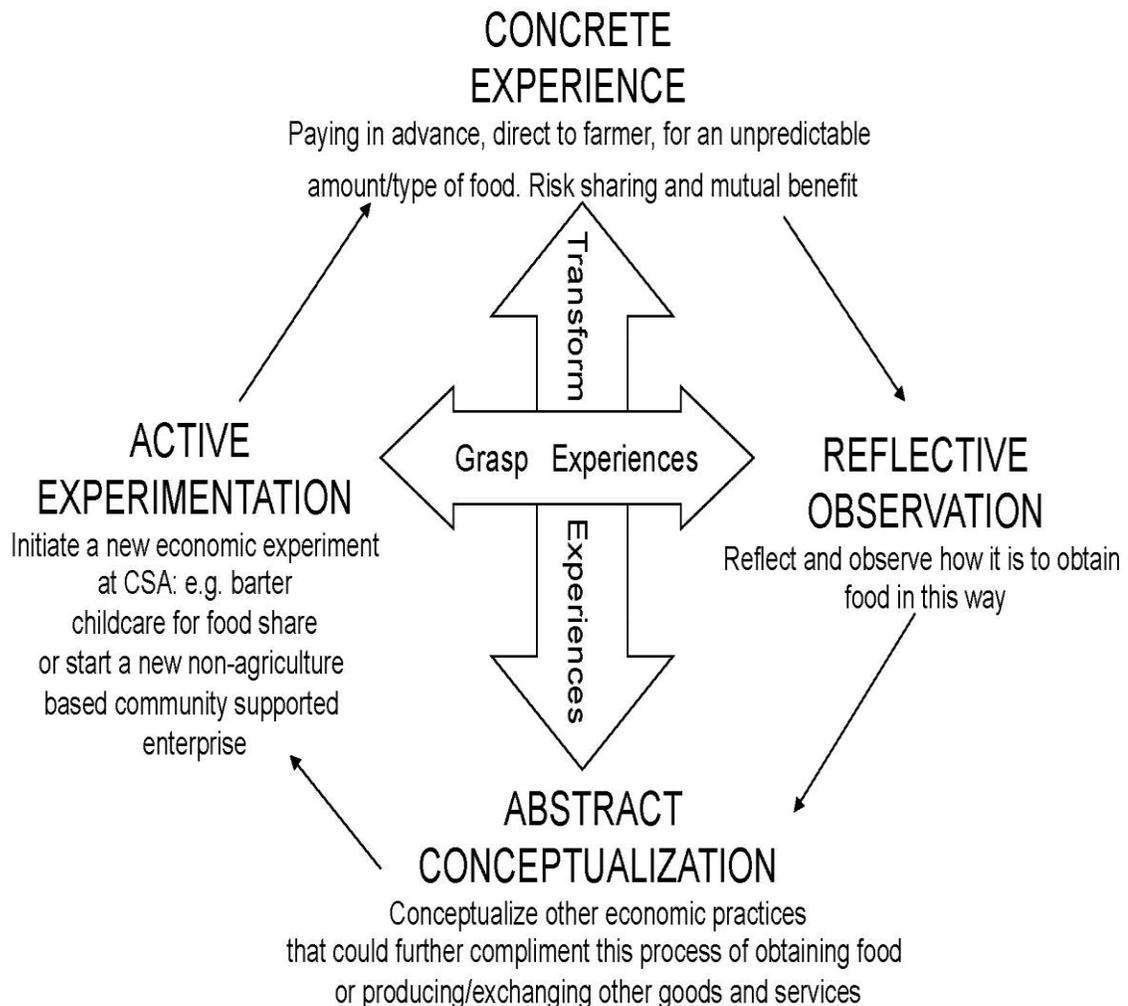
**Table B.1: Diverse Economic Activity Occuring via Community Supported Agriculture for this study 2010-2012**

Diverse Economic Activity Occurring via Community Supported Agriculture for this study 2010-2012.

<b>Transactions</b>	<b>Labor</b>	<b>Enterprise</b>
<b>Market</b>	<b>Wage</b>	<b>Capitalist</b>
<b>Alternative Market</b> -Pick-your-own crops -Sliding scale prices -Alternative Currency: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) accepted	<b>Alternative Paid</b> -Self-Employed -Workers employed by non-profit -Apprentices (receive education, housing, and pay) -	<b>Alternative Capitalist</b> -Non-profit -Socially responsible -Green capitalist
<b>Non-Market</b> -State allocations: funding for Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) -Local allocations: funding for community land preservation -Monetary donations received for community land trust purchases, etc. -Food donations given to food banks, shelters -Farmers and members share food, trade it for services, or give it away -Gleaning -Foraging	<b>Unpaid</b> -Volunteers: -Work trades -Self-provisioning: farmers/apprentices are producing much of their own food	<b>Non-Capitalist</b> Communal/Community Land Trust

**Diverse Economic Activity occurring via Community Supported Agriculture in the Pioneer Valley of Western Massachusetts 2010-2012**  
 Ted White 2012 (after A Diverse Economy diagram by J.K. Gibson-Graham)

## Experiential Learning Model for Creating Diverse Economic Practices via Community Supported Agriculture



(Ted White 2011; based on David Kolb's Experiential Learning Flow Chart 1984)

**Figure B:2: Experiential Learning Model for Creating Diverse Economic Practices via Community Supported Agriculture**

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