

## Chapter Three: Communicate!

There are two primary aspects to communication that we will discuss here. *Promotion* is what you do to find members. *Ongoing communication* is how you keep your members informed. We will cover written promotion here; look to the section on *Recruiting Members* for more information on communicating your message through other means, like programs and meetings.

### Promotion

#### Brochures and flyers

A flyer, poster or brochure is often a prospective member's first contact with a farm. You may have only one opportunity to impress those prospective farm members. So how do you make the best impression?

- Clarity: make sure your message is clear and contact information is easy to find.
- Who – you, the farmer and the farm (do you have a picture or logo?).
- What – a CSA farm share. Be sure to tell what it is in a sentence or two (veggies, some herbs and a bouquet, number of weeks).
- Where – at the farm (directions) or delivery spots, including times.
- When – “starting in early June, every week on a Monday.”
- How Much – “cost for a share is \$300 that feeds a small family.”
- Why – here is where your true message comes; is your message about community, health, child rearing, environment or keeping open space? Tell them... briefly.

A **poster** might have just a few key phrases, with contact information. A **flyer** or **brochure** can obviously have more detail.

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#### Some Considerations

- Make it easy to read.
- Provide clear ‘headings’ so that your future members find information easily. Headings like “What is CSA?” and “What Can I Expect?” direct people to some basic information.
- Keep it simple. People are busy. You can tell them plenty more if they sign up, but overwhelming verbiage at the beginning may be counterproductive.
- Make it inviting: logos or graphics help break up space and make a brochure or flyer more accessible. Make sure to leave ‘white space.’ This means that the whole page is not filled with words (or even words and pictures). Generous margins around the page and around graphics make your publication more appealing. Avoid too much bold, capitalized or underlined text to make it more inviting.
- Try to use key phrases that distill your message. Examples are “Fresh Organic Food Weekly” or “Five Springs Farm Member Potluck.”
- Proofread it! Then have someone else proofread it.

#### Ongoing Communication

One way that CSA is distinguished from other forms of farming is the way most growers communicate with their members. For many growers a printed or online newsletter is the best way to keep members informed and interested.

#### Newsletters

Newsletters are a wonderful gift to your CSA members. Many growers have a weekly newsletter (at least during the growing season). Others opt for bi-weekly,

monthly or at irregular intervals. Consider, though, that you are more likely to adhere to a regular schedule, whatever that schedule is.



## Mariquita Farm

down thoughts as they come up.

- Have regular columns that are easy like “veggies

this week” or calendar of events.

- Tell your members the condition of the crops, the weather, what other factors are impacting crops (for better or worse).
- Try to be clear, precise, expressive, warm, concise, respectful and welcoming.
- Remember that simplicity is a virtue.
- If you cannot squeeze in the time, or if you are uncomfortable writing, ask a farm member who might be happy to fill in.

But putting a newsletter together week after week can be a burden to the farmer who already has too much to do. Your newsletter does not have to be fancy or time consuming. You could ask a farm member to write it for you, or various members might contribute. Some growers write some general content in the off-season to be plugged in at appropriate times during the growing season. Others prefer the spontaneity of writing it in the thick of the season. Here are a few ideas to help keep a newsletter ‘current:’

- Start with a quote to get your juices flowing; garden quotes are easy to find on the web or get a book of quotes.
- Writing just after harvest or a walk through the fields will give you inspiration
- Keep a pad handy during the week to jot

### How Long, How Often?

There are no rules. One page - one side, half a page - both sides, four or more pages on 11x17” paper, all are options. Some of the limitations are these:

- How much you have to say.
- How much time you have to get it said.
- The time and attention span of your farm members.
- The capabilities of your printing or copying system...*and* make sure to budget for the expense of reproduction.

### Computers and ‘Desktop Publishing’

Computers provide a way to publish a newsletter with ease. It can be a simple text document or one full of color, graphics and a fancy layout.

To publish a regular newsletter with ease- at least one with a fancy layout - it is important to set it up in advance. Design a template, with your basic features, like title and logo, into which you can simply plug in your text. Set up any repeating features, like “this week’s veggies.” See examples in sample copies of newsletters.

How the template works will depend on the publishing program you use. Most suites of home or office programs will include a simple publishing program. Microsoft Works and

#### Thoughts on Newsletters

At Five Springs Farm we consider the weekly newsletter to be one of our responsibilities to our members; but it is no burden—usually. The newsletter is where members learn about the effect of the weather on their crops, for better and worse. We saw one farm’s newsletter that had a regular column: The Weather your Crops Lived Through this Week. The newsletter is where we warn of impending crop loses and excesses. We remind the membership of farm rules, pickup times, etc. The newsletter can inform our members of other producers and products in the region. Farm events are publicized well in advance. We tell stories or write short essays. We make bad vegetable puns. It can be playful, serious, informative or any combination of these. A favorite regular feature is the weekly quote; we keep a file of good quotes and aphorisms, or look for one on one of the many Internet sources. Often the quote jump-starts the newsletter.

We always try to have fun in the newsletter’s making, and that can translate into more fun in its reading. This is our first ‘rule’ of the farm newsletter: make it fun. A close second is: make it easy. We consider it a success when we see how much our members appreciate it •

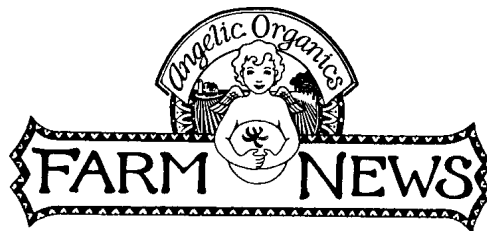
Word have newsletter formats that you can use (or, better, modify) and save for next time.

The better layout programs like Adobe Pagemaker and Quark XPress are pricey, complicated and more powerful than you need for a newsletter. What makes them 'better' is control — you can control the spacing of words and images on the page easily, for example.

Microsoft Publisher is a reasonable compromise between price and control.

Whatever program you use, figure out the basics in the wintertime when you have time to spare. Become familiar with the basic commands, peculiarities and options contained in the program then follow basic rules about design to make the information clear and the presentation attractive.

Show some restraint. The power of even the simplest computer program is seductive. So many options! Remember that simplicity is a virtue. Stick to a few carefully chosen typefaces, styles and sizes.



## The Internet

With more people online than ever before, the internet can save time, money and paper. Email newsletters, Blogs and websites can be ways to communicate with immediacy. There are free website and blog options, and almost everyone with a computer has an email account. So far none of our writers has much experience with this. We will share a few points.

**Email:** Easy to set up and familiar to most. Doing anything fancy requires more expertise than many of us can muster to the task. But if you do something fancy (or a farm member does), make sure it is not something that will stretch the capabilities of a slow dialup modem.

**Websites:** This is an option for posting something a bit fancier, that your members can visit at their leisure (maybe coupled with a quick email note that a new edition is available). With little or no web experience you can build nice websites from template-based free or inexpensive web services.

**Blogs:** The simplest website newsletter option is a blog, and several options for template based, free sites are available. These can be set up to be interactive (your members can talk back!) or not. They can also be set up to be more or less private.

## The Old Fashioned Way

If the Internet is too new and scary and desktop publishing makes you dizzy, consider some old fashioned methods.

- Cut-and-paste material together to run through a copy machine.
- Hand write your weekly letter and make copies for your farm members.
- If your members come to one central distribution area use a chalk board for simple messages.
- Ask a member to be responsible for the newsletter, perhaps for a discount on the price of a share.



In the final analysis, the only real measure of your newsletter is whether

# five springs Farm News

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it is read and enjoyed by your members. It is much more important to get it out there than to get it “right.”

## Surveys

Surveys help members feel they are part of the farm by providing feedback on everything from produce preferences to the time of pick-up. What members want from participating in a CSA must be clearly understood by the farmer. Let your members speak to you. One farm asks 2 or 3 questions on a postcard and puts it in the member's box to get feedback. We, the farmers, cannot know what members want unless we give them an opportunity to tell us. A survey is more technical and demanding than other communication. An entertaining and reasonably complete guide to surveys is in Appendix B

Resources

Desktop Publishing

**Looking Good in Print**, Roger Parker, Ventana Press. Easily accessible information on design elements for newsletters, brochures, advertisements and other written communication.

**Newsletters from the Desktop**, Joe Grossmann with David Doty, Ventana Press. Specific, detailed information on newsletters.

**Free Websites – large, searchable listings available at the following sites:**

<http://www.free-webhosts.com/>

<http://www.freewebspace.net/>

**Blogs**

<http://www.blogger.com> – simple template based blogs, easy to understand and use. And free •

### Kurt Vonnegut on Writing

- Find a subject you care about
- Do not ramble, though
- Keep it simple
- Have the guts to cut
- Sound like yourself
- Say what you mean
- Pity the readers

