

Appendix D: Is CSA Farming Right For You?

Presented here are some considerations concerning being a CSA Farmer. There are no right or wrong 'answers' but many thought provoking ideas for you to consider.

A. The Business of CSA (see also Chapter 8): A CSA Farm is a business with you as the manager, CEO and worker

1. review your strengths and your challenges regarding your education and experience in the areas of

- Farming/ gardening,
- Marketing/ management
- Machinery work
- Complementary activities
- Social skills.

What are your strengths and challenges? How can you play on your strengths / overcome your challenges? How are you unique in any of these areas?

2. What type of farming operation would you be happy with? Have you ever had a job that required you to work outdoors in all kinds of weather? If not, would you really enjoy working when it is too cold, rainy, windy, or hot & humid, buggy, etc? If not, then maybe a hoop house operation rather than a field operation is more your style. Different personalities are happier with different types of farming systems. Consider aspects of your personality such as

- Introvert or extrovert
- Mostly right-brained or left-brained
- Importance of off-farm activities (family, vacations etc)
- Multi-tasker or methodical (one-thing-at-a-time)
- Maximum income pre acre or more of an artisan

3. Will this be a solo venture or will you be in partnership with someone (spouse, friend, etc.)? If it will be a partnership

- How do your strengths complement each other?
- Put in writing things such as who will do which jobs and how you will resolve differences
- How will all of the profits/losses be shared?
- Do either of you want employees or interns?
- Take time to write out your five-year plan then compare and adjust as needed

B. The Ecosystem on Your Farm

An ecosystem is composed of all the living and non-living factors that are present or influence an area. Your farm is a unique ecosystem – get to know it so that you can play on its strengths but also know when and how much you will have to intervene to get a crop. Things to consider are

1. Climatic Factors:

- Temperature (influenced by proximity to water, elevation, latitude, slope, face)
- Frost free days
- Growing Degree Days
- Hardiness zone (important if you will include fruit or perennials)

- Insolation (amount of sunlight received)
- Precipitation patterns
- Consider the plants and animals that are not crops - such as pollinators, rabbits & deer, windbreaks, weed indicators - that exist on the land or that you might introduce
- Air movement, and are there any micro-climates

4. Soil Factors:

- Texture, rockiness, structure
- Moisture retention, fertility (macro & micro nutrients), pH
- Organic matter, soil organisms (macro & micro)
- Water: quantity and quality.

5. People:

- Are you in an urban setting or a rural
- Are the people close by your farm financially secure or not
- Do many have their own gardens
- Is it a resort area or university town
- In your market area, are there any categories where you believe you have an advantage or disadvantage compared to other CSA farms? Are there any production systems to use to your advantage?

6. Current Infrastructure

Make sure that your investments in infrastructure are appropriate to the type of farm you intend.

- Consider your land, do you own or rent, is it paid for or not, is it agriculturally zoned?
- Consider your equipment needs. Think in terms of *tasks* not *tools* before investing in equipment. For example, do you need a *tractor* just because you are a *farm*?
- What buildings do you have now on the farm; you may need storage for equipment, a wash & packing area, distribution area, parking if people are coming to the farm, and perhaps some sort of season extension.
- What kind of water capabilities do you have for the gardens? Can you manage during an extended drought?

7. Putting It All Together

With all of these questions in mind, develop a Vision Statement for your farm stating:

- How you will optimize your unique personal and natural resources ?
- How will you overcome your personal, infrastructure or ecosystem challenges?
- How is your market different from others and how you will use this to your advantage?
- Include financial goals, sources of outside income, health insurance or considerations, number of shares needed to make the living that you desire with the price of those shares?
- Estimate your annual operating costs and compare above.
- Any marketing details that are unique to your operation, along with your growing abilities and talents •