

Community Supported Agriculture: A viable localized self-sustaining food system?

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Abstract

The Soil Association has for many years supported the development of sustainable local food systems through running “action-research” projects that enable groups of stakeholders to try out new approaches and learn from the process. Our work has made a major contribution to the growth of the UK local food sector since the mid-1990s.

In the light of renewed concerns about increasing oil prices, overreliance on fossil fuels, the negative impact of climate change on food production, and food security, what self-sustaining local food system models are really viable and offer the most benefits?

The Community Supported Agriculture approach is possibly the ultimate in achieving a low-carbon self-sustaining localized food and farming system. But is it a “niche” concept that is far too “dark green” to appeal to a wide audience? The Soil Association is running a four-year CSA program to promote the CSA approach as a viable and sustainable business model for local food production and supply and to support the growth of the UK CSA network.

This paper suggests that the CSA approach has a significant contribution to make in keeping smaller-scale food production systems viable, in addressing food security issues for local communities, and in creating tangible quality-of-life improvements for both the farmers and the members. The organic movement should therefore work together to proactively promote the approach, drawing on ever-increasing inspirational examples both in the UK and elsewhere.

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