

# ***Manitoba Shared Farming: An Examination of the Contributions of Southern Manitoba Community Supported Agriculture Initiatives for Rural Communities***

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*Using southern Manitoba as a case study, this paper explores the contributions made to sustainable rural livelihoods by direct farm marketing models such as Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) and farmer's markets. Although the majority of farmer's market vendors operate using conventional practices, many small-scale organic producers sell their goods via CSA and/or Farmer's markets. Direct farm marketing models often exist in the informal economy and subsequently their economic and social impacts, contributions to farm and household income, and impacts on the broader community remain unmeasured. Existing research on CSAs focuses on social and ideological aspects largely ignoring the economic realities.*

*Through the use of case studies, surveys of vendors and consumers, and interviews with key informants and market coordinators, this paper will examine the challenges to Manitoba organic producers and conventional vendors marketing through CSA's and farmers' markets. Preliminary reviews of these challenges reveal them to mirror those faced by rural communities. Challenges include ageing populations, transportation, labor availability and cost, economies of scale, length of the growing season, lack of supports and marketing channels, and low rates of return. Among small scale organic producers concerns regarding equity and distribution of their products rank highly as a barrier to the establishment of sustainable pricing. Alternative models and regulatory reforms (including certification) are needed to increase the viability of local consumption at a socially acceptable price. Who should internalize the true costs of sustainable food production? Can organics provide a viable option for sustainable rural livelihood strategies?*

## **Introduction**

In today's economic climate communities must contend with what has been termed the emergence of the "New Economy". Blakely and Bradshaw (2002) characterize the new economy by the following four attributes: "globalization, accelerated pace, knowledge base, and networks." (p4). The New Economy has resulted in a shift from traditional industries such as agriculture, mining, logging, and manufacturing (Community Futures, 1994) to more knowledge and service based sectors (Blakely and Bradshaw, 2002). This shift is significantly apparent in our most "intimate commodity" (Winson 1993), our food supply.

## **The Farm Crisis**

Rural communities and their composite households are particularly vulnerable to the market forces of the New Economy due to their small size (Douglas 2003), traditional dependence on a single resource or industry, and marginalized position in an increasingly rural hinterland-urban metropolis context (Bradfield, 1988).

Agriculturally based communities have been particularly hard hit. In his book “Something's Wrong Somewhere: Globalization, Community and the Moral Economy of the Farm Crisis”, Christopher Lind (1996) outlines how changes in production practices seen as necessary to remain “economically viable” (intensive high input/output agriculture) have resulted in increasing expenses, the need for increased bank loans, and a steady decline in grain prices since the 1980's. These factors, coupled with high interest rates and the removal of subsidies, have resulted in increasing debt, farm bankruptcy, increased out-migration from rural areas, and the closure of many rural communities. Brewster Kneen (1993) describes the farm crisis by stating that “farm numbers continue to shrink while the remaining farms get larger and larger” (p107).

Lind (1996) highlights four “moral themes” emerging from the farm crisis. As identified by farmers experiencing the crisis these themes are “the significance of agriculture for national sovereignty; the need for co-operation amid the loss of community; the crisis in the family who farms; and the increasing sense of powerlessness” (p 24). Kneen indicates that many farmers have “resigned themselves to what appears to be the new reality of “global competition” (p107). However not all farmers and communities are passively giving way to the “new realities” of a global economy.

### **Local Food**

The Global Economy's creation of a geographical dislocation and psychological disconnect between consumers and producers has created what some have termed a “new focus on regionalism...a social reaction against the global market expansion. The community food security movement is part of this trend, emphasizing decentralization, community action, local decision making, and finding a sense of place...the ideas that “place matters” and “scale matters” have been crucial to the community food security approach” (Allen 1999). New attention has been focused on farmers' markets, food buying coops, U-pick stands, niche and specialty local food production, and urban agriculture initiatives while food production practices such as organic agriculture are becoming more popular. In addition farmers' and consumers have devised alternative and innovative models of food production and distribution such as Community Shared Agriculture.

### **Community Shared Agriculture**

Community Shared Agriculture first emerged in the 1960's in Europe and Asia (Cone and Kakaliouras, 1995, Imhoff, 1996). In 1965, Japanese mothers, concerned about the loss of arable land and increase in imported foods started the first CSA projects, called *teikei* in Japanese. Today Japan has over 600 producer-consumer partnerships supplying food to over 11 million people (University of Wisconsin, 2002). The first North American CSAs, formed in the mid 1980's, have spawned over 1,000 similar enterprises (University of Wisconsin, 2002).

CSA is a partnership between a farmer and consumers. Members of a CSA purchase a share (usually between \$200-\$500) in the farm's harvest prior to the growing season. In return members receive a portion of the farms seasonal produce for between 12 and 20 weeks. This form of partnership guarantees farmers a market and allows the risks and benefits of farming to be shared between the farmer and the consumers.

CSAs farm using organic and sometimes biodynamic principles and their organizational structures take many forms which may include family farms, worker or consumer coops, nonprofit organizations, or multi farm CSAs. Shareholder involvement in their CSA is varied, ranging from subscription service CSAs with shareholders as "silent partners", to farms where members are involved in farm labor and the decision making process of the farm. Imhoff (1996) states that CSAs involve "mutually beneficial relationships within a community of consumers, environmentally sustainable farming practices, and public education on contemporary agricultural issues" (p 425). Cooley and Lass (1998) cite Kelvin's (1994) terming of CSA as a "dynamic social interaction" that occurs on ideological, environmental and economic grounds (p2). Cone and Myhre (2000) state CSA "movement" is oppositional to current agricultural trends and that some supporters of "present CSA as a radical attempt to resist industrial agriculture" (p188).

## **Benefits**

The social, natural, and to a lesser extent human capital assets, and environmental, dietary, psychological, and even spiritual (Cone and Myhre 2000) impacts associated with CSAs have been well documented (Ashiabi, 1995, Fieldhouse 1996, Kaktins, 1997, Cooley and Lass 1998, Wells, Gradwell, and Yoder, 1999, Sanneh et al, 2001).

Currently a typical North American food item travels over 1,400 miles before being consumed and changes hands at least six times along the way (Schueller, 2001). In contrast, the majority of CSA initiatives are organic and bioregional resulting in decreased chemical inputs, reduced transportation and packaging and related environmental benefits.

The extension department of the University of Massachusetts (2002) describes CSAs as putting "the farmers face on food" by creating a sense of social responsibility and stewardship of local land. CSA farms that fully involve members in decision making and where neighbors mobilize to co-ordinate food pick-ups and distribution have been credited as providing opportunities for personal empowerment (Wells, Gradwell and Yoder, 1999), reconnection, and opportunities for community development. DeLind and Ferguson (1999) state that "CSA members can build interpersonal trust and a sense of community rooted in place" (p191). Sharp, Imerman, and Peters (2002) found that CSAs created "cooperative networks" (p6) and speculate that the role of CSAs in connecting

urban consumers and rural residents may lead to the creation of social capital which they define as “a type of social resource associated with trust and networks” (p6). Other benefits include the socio-economic significance of local production and local spending (Sanneh, Moffitt, and Lass, 2001, Getz and Morse,1995) in addition to increased choice and self reliance in the food system.

### **Manitoba Community Shared Agriculture**

Dyck (1994) chronicles the development of CSAs on the Prairies. In November 1991 Manitoba farmers and interested individuals gathered for a series of five meetings to brainstorm ways of creating “an agri-food system that directly links the farmer with the consumer in an environmentally just way” (Wiens in Dyck 1994, p 234). The group developed the concept of “Shared Farming”, a term coined by Dan Wiens, a farmer with a successful market garden business.

Realizing their concept was similar to international models such as *teikei* in Japan and Community Supported Agriculture in the United States the group attended a CSA conference in Michigan. In February 1992 a newspaper article was published in the Winnipeg Free Press which resulted in over 200 applications for Shared Farming membership.

The Shared Farming model was featured in newspapers and articles across the province. Dyck (1994) states that through media attention and “proselytizing efforts” (p238) over 20 Shared Farms were initiated across the Prairies in one year. Dyck states that “the prairie experience...inspired the creation of 10 farms in Ontario” (p244).

By 1995 there were approximately 12 CSA’s operating in Southern Manitoba (Community Shared Agriculture Canada, 1995, Beeman and Rowley, 1994, Salm 1997). In 1997 Salm reported seven CSAs in Manitoba.

As of 2003, three farms were fully operating as CSAs with a fourth farm phasing CSA out of the family farm. Only two farms have firm plans to offer shares in 2005. A third farm is looking for someone to grow for existing CSA members while they take a year off and decide whether to retire.

This paper will examine the Manitoba experience with the CSA model through a sustainable livelihoods framework.

### **Sustainable Livelihoods**

The sustainable livelihoods approach evolved out of the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development’s Brundtland Report (Scoones 1998) and has traditionally been associated with rural poverty reduction and environmental management in developing countries (Leinan 2002).

Building on a definition by Chambers and Conway (1992), Scoones (1998) defines Sustainable Livelihoods by stating that:

“A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base. (p5)”

Ellis (2000) adds to this definition by stating that “a livelihood comprises the assets..., the activities, and the access to these (mediated by institutions and social relations) that together determine the living gained by the individual or household (p10). Ellis’ concept of access to assets is not discussed within the confines of this paper.

Livelihoods are constructed through the combination of assets, also referred to as capital or capital assets. Brocklesby and Fisher (2003) identify five key assets as “*social capital* (social networks and relationships of trust), *natural capital* (natural resource stocks), *financial capital* (savings, income, credit), *physical capital* (transport, shelter, water, energy, communications) and *human capital* (skills, knowledge, labor)” (p187). In addition Radoki (1999) identifies political capital as a potential asset. The ability to which individuals are able to pursue livelihood strategies depends on their individual combination of capital assets (Rakodi, 1999).

The combination of these assets to form a livelihood is often called a “livelihood portfolio”. The diversity in livelihood portfolios and ability to access assets is the result of predetermined factors such as gender (Chambers and Conway, 1992 in Leinan, 2002), and external factors such as cultural and historical influences, fluctuating political climates, geographical conditions, (Leinan, 2002), and individual combinations of need, preference, and level of control over assets (Scoones 1998).

While the examination of Canadian CSA farmers is external to the traditional use of the sustainable livelihoods framework, there appear to be significant parallels between the clusters of rural livelihood strategies implemented in both developing and industrialized countries. These livelihood strategy clusters include increasing livelihood opportunities by intensifying or extensifying (increasing land under cultivation) agricultural activities, seeking off farm income, or temporarily/permanently moving away (Scoones 1998) from the farm. It is hoped that sufficient parallels can be drawn between the livelihood strategies of rural agriculturally based communities of both societies to warrant the widening of the application of this approach.

## **Methodology**

Research techniques include reviews of relevant literature, case studies, surveys of vendors and consumers, and interviews with key informants and market coordinators.

In total farmers on nine CSA farms were interviewed. In depth interviews were conducted with nine farmers from four operating CSAs, and phone interviews were conducted with five former CSA farmers. Information on an additional two CSAs came from pre-existing research (Kaktins,1997) and Canadian CSA listings (Ecological Farmer's Association 1995, and Beeman and Rowley,1994).

Self administered member surveys were conducted at two CSA farms with 18 of 20 members (90%) and 50 of 95 members (53%) responding. Results from a pre-existing phone survey provided data on an additional 63 members from a third CSA.

## **Results**

Shared Farming in Manitoba was born largely from the movement of a small number of individuals to develop sustainable livelihood strategies that would allow farmers to cope with and even redress the perceived resulting “stresses and shocks” of the global economy to rural (producer based) and urban (consumer based) livelihoods. The primary motivations of four existing CSA farms are documented below and indicate the high prioritization of maintaining and enhancing natural capital assets (farm land and the environment), and building social capital for the benefit of the community and household benefit. While not a primary motivating factor, the development of financial capital was expressed as essential to ensure household sustainability.

## **Motivation**

### **Current CSA Farmers**

The motivations of four existing CSAs for diversifying their livelihood strategy through the addition of CSA are listed below. With the exception of Farm#2 (where CSA is the sole farm activity) CSA represented diversification by the addition of a livelihood activity to the farm. Appendix A provides a profile of Manitoba CSA farms in 2003 and Appendix B outlines former Manitoba CSA farms.

The motivations of CSA farmers mirror those by Manitoba organic farmers identified in the 2002 Manitoba Organic Report by Wuerch, Urbina and Diachun (2002). The report states that although “organic farming is generating a very low income for the majority of producers in the province....Financial gain is not the most important reason to engage in organic farming. The environment and personal beliefs are ranked one and two as the main reasons for going organic” (Wuerch, Urbina and Diachun, 2002, p1). Seen in the context of sustainable rural livelihoods, households involved in CSA and organic farming rank the development of social capital assets and the preservation and improvement of natural assets higher than the generation of financial assets.

### **Farm#1 (family farm)**

Farmers from Farm #1one stated that “[CSA] works well because I love the break from my office job... it's ideal. We love it. You couldn't ask for a better situation really, to do what you love during the summer...and have people involved and benefiting from it. We

Shared Farm to build a form of agriculture that accounts for social, economic and environmental justice. We're idealists, but we make money as well. We love gardening and want to nudge agriculture back to a more human form doing what we love."

"We decided our share size almost exclusively on quality of life. You don't want to be too busy. The other side of the coin is that you need enough shares to make the economics of it work out. So it's a balance between quality of life and economics but you don't go blindly into it... it has to make sense for us too... None of us are doing this just for the money. If we wanted to just make money there are a lot easier ways of doing it."

"There's a lot of this we enjoy and we believe in it. But we do try to do this so that it makes sense economically too...Otherwise we can be all happy and flowery about these things but it's only going to last a little while and then it's going to die unless you are doing it in such a way that you can actually make a living at it. Otherwise it's smoke and mirrors."

### **Farm #2 (a workers co-op for new Canadians)**

The CSA was started to provide new Manitoban's with fair wages for their agricultural products while providing sustainably produced local food (Villegas 2001).

### **Farm#3 (family farm)**

Farmers from Farm#3 cite the desire to farm in an "ecologically sound, socially just and economically viable" manner and see CSA as a response to the current food system and the environmental and farm crisis (Kaktins 1997).

A farmer from Farm#3 states that "We farm because we believe it's important... Even though money is certainly important to us, it's not the main reason we do it. We could go and get part time jobs and earn a whole lot more money per hour then we do doing this ... never mind pension or health benefits. We do it to supplement our pension and ...socially it connects us with other people we wouldn't otherwise connect with."

### **Farm 4 (family farm)**

When asked by Kaktins (1997) about her motivations for farming the main farmer from Farm #4 quotes Frank Lloyd Wright) by stating that "the future of mankind is dependent on every human being intimately associated with half an acre of ground" and states that "we are for the earth and aim to pass it on to our children in as good or better condition as when we received it" (p141).

In an interview in 2003 she stated that the reason she started the CSA was that "we were already farming organically...I decided to stay home and still wanted to bring in income...I was interested in the educational aspect of city people reconnecting with the

land and people were always finding their way out to our farm anyway so we just tried it.”

### Former CSA farmers

Of the five former CSA farms interviewed two began CSAs to transform physical assets (excess produce from existing farm livelihood activities) into financial assets while two began CSA farming specifically to diversify the financial capital assets from their farm. One former CSA farmer began primarily for philosophical reasons. Kaktins (1997) indicates that a sixth CSA farmer began for similar reasons which she listed as “providing seasonal organic food to consumers, address environmental concerns, preserving farmlands, improving the local economy, and educating others about farming and food production. Monetary gain was of low importance” (p136).

One CSA farmer that was interviewed stated that “I’m sure there’s a lot of organic farms that make it because people have made the choice of saying “this is what we want, this is what we like” therefore we stick to it and they’re not getting rich on it but they’re definitely making a living. I don’t know too many Organic farms that don’t have some kind of farm subsidy of sorts either if it’s selling land, or at least one of the two [partners] working out. And I mean that’s pretty much par for the course as far as conventional farming is concerned. You’ve got 75% of the farms in Manitoba that are being subsidised by outside income and that’s either one of the two people of the couple that are working. That’s a big percent. That’s Canada’s stats. I think it’s the whole farm sector that’s in crisis. Not just the organic[farmers].”

### Consumer Motivation

Members of Farms #1 and #3 were asked to rank their top five reasons (one being the highest) from a list that included “get fresh produce”, “cheaper way to purchase organic produce”, “health reasons”, “environmental concerns”, “want to eat local produce”, “want to support local farmer”, “want to know local farmer”, “want to know where/how food is grown, and ”want to share risk with farmers”. Predominantly ranked reasons of CSA members who responded to the survey are listed in Table one.

**Table 1 Consumer motivations for joining a CSA<sup>1</sup>**

Rank	Farm#1 (n=50)	Percent	Farm#3 (n=18)	Percent
1	Get Fresh Produce	34	Get Fresh Produce	63
2	Want to eat local produce	26	Want to eat local produce	35
3	Support local Farmer	19	Support local farmer/ Environmental concerns	22
4	Environmental concerns	23	Environmental concerns	24

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix C for a complete table of motivation rankings

5	Health reasons	17.0	Support local Farmer	23.5
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For Farms#1 and #3 of those items ranked number one the predominant item was to “Get fresh produce” indicating a primary ranking of quality of household access to resources needed to maintain and develop human capital, over the development and maintenance of social and financial assets. However, although the order of rank was the same, the magnitude of response for “Get fresh produce” as the number one reason was much lower for Farm #1 (34%) than for Farm #3 (63%). This reflects that responding members indicated a wider variety of reasons for rank number one (see Appendix C). For example for Farm#1, the second most predominant reason for rank number one was to support local farmer (21.3%).

For both farms of those items ranked second the predominant was to eat local produce, indicating an understanding of the benefits of local food (increased freshness, decreased transportation costs and resulting fossil fuel use).

For the items ranked third the predominant one was “wanting to support the local farmer”, indicating the preference for the development of social assets and the community benefits of preserving financial assets within the local community (employment, income circulation etc).

Although reasons that would indicate a high consumer interest in developing social assets with farmers such as “want to know local farmer” and ”want to share risk with farmers” were not ranked predominantly in the top five reasons, neither were reasons such as “cheaper way to purchase organic produce” which would indicate a high ranking of household financially based assets.

In a telephone interview conducted in 2003, Hemery et al.(2003) asked CSA members of Farm #2, a workers coop, their primary reason for joining the CSA The responses of those members surveyed are listed in Table 2).

**Table 2 Consumer motivations for joining a CSA**

<b>Farm#2 (n=63)</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Support of New Canadians	22.2
Avoidance of chemical Residues	14.3
Quality of Food	12.7
Health	11.1
Social aspects of belonging to the Earthshare Co-operative	9.5
Protection of the environment	4.8
More than one	6.3
All of the above	15.9

For Farm #2 a workers coop, consumers responding to the survey indicated that their primary single reason for joining the coop was to “support new Canadians by providing jobs”. Secondary and tertiary reasons were listed as “Avoidance of chemical residues” (14.3%) and “Quality of food” (12.7%) Members of Farm#2 who responded to the survey ranked human capital assets such as health, and the preservation of natural assets through decreased chemical use highly. Although these factors were important to members, more respondents ranked the development of community financial assets through increased jobs as a motivating factor than direct benefits to their individual households.

Overall the three farm member surveys indicate a high prioritisation of human capital (access to food) with the preservation of community financial and natural assets also ranked highly.

### **Natural Capital**

Natural capital includes access to physical natural resource stocks such as land, soil nutrients, air and water quality, and “environmental services” (Scoones, 1998 p7) such as pollution sinks.

With the exception of CSA farm #2, a workers coop who does not pay rent on their land, both current and former CSAs owned more than sufficient land to operate a CSA and other diverse farm activities (u-pick, forage, livestock, fruit for processing etc.).

Manitoba CSAs directly connect producers and consumers through food that has traveled less than 50kms and the potential environmental benefits of this type of farming have been previously outlined. Both currently operating and former Manitoba CSAs have farmed using organic methods. Of the four CSAs operating in 2003, Farms #1 and #2 are certified. While Farms #3 and #4 meet certification standards they have not certified given the associated costs.

As is demonstrated in the motivation section both farmers and consumers involved in the CSA method perceive bioregional organic food production and consumption to assist in the preservation of natural capital for their households and future generations. Some CSA farmers have stated that the benefits of organic farming go beyond decreased use of fossil fuels and chemicals, and little or no packaging to include the restoration and improvement of the land they farm.

### **Physical capital**

When defined in economic terms physical capital includes goods used to produce a source of income or “producer good[s] as contrasted to a consumer good” (Ellis 2000 p 33).

The home based and comparatively small scale approach to CSA has meant that Manitoba farmers’ have not had to go outside existing home facilities for processing space and transportation. When compared to average conventional family farms the

decreased emphasis on mechanization and increased reliance on human assets by small scale organics have results in low dependency on physical assets.

However CSA farmers indicated that the low financial returns from CSA can sometimes result in limited acquisition of physical assets. The non profit status of Farm#2 allowed it to acquire a grant to procure greenhouse materials, a tractor, and irrigation equipment it would otherwise not have been able to afford.

Transportation costs were cited as barriers for Farm#2 and Farm #4. Farm #2 plans to relocate at least part of the farming activity closer to the majority of sharers. Farm #1 has plans to develop a commercial kitchen on their property for additional food processing.

The homes, greenhouses, and gardens of two former CSA farmers were destroyed in the 1997 Red River valley flood. In the aftermath both farmers were forced to relocate to land with poor quality soil. The loss of physical and natural assets resulted in these farmers discontinuing two CSAs. One of the key elements of sustainable rural livelihoods is their ability to “cope with and recover from stresses and shocks”. Clearly the loss of land and resulting discontinuation of the CSA highlight the dependence of agricultural livelihoods on natural and physical assets.

Barring such unfortunate natural disasters both current and former CSA farmers interviewed did not express physical assets as a barrier to their livelihood.

### **Human Capital**

Human Capital includes quantity and quality of labor in terms of skill, physical ability and health (Scoones 1998).

In terms of diversifying human capital at the household level of the four operating CSAs one farm had both heads of the household working part time off farm, in another both farmers were retired, in the workers coop the head farmer had an off season job, and in the farm phasing out of CSA the spouse of the farmer had a full time off farm job. Of the five former CSAs interviewed three were full time farmers while two others had spouses who worked off farm. A sixth CSA was a full time farmer with a spouse working off farm (Kaktins, 1997).

### **Required Human Capital for the CSA model**

Participant observation revealed that direct marketing and the removal of intermediaries result in the diversification of skills for a CSA farmer. A farmer turned CSA becomes manager, marketer, producer, processor, packager, retailer, distributor, delivery driver, public relations and volunteer coordinator, accountant, and educator.

All four currently operating CSAs utilize labor outside the family while former CSAs reported no labor external to self and family at the time of operation. The largest two operating CSAs (Farm#1 and Farm#2) have full time apprentices and hired farm workers

while farms#3 and #4 have volunteers through the Willing Workers On Organic Farms program (WWOOF) and other youth volunteers.

In addition to diversification of human capital the CSA model increases the volume required of this capital asset for production. The high levels of labor associated with the CSA model have been identified in several CSA studies (Laird, 1995, Kaktins, 1997, DeLind, 1999). In Laird's 1993 survey of North American CSA farmers (Laird in Henderson 1999) he identified 55% of pre-existing farmers utilizing the CSA method felt their workload had increased, however despite this, 79% of respondents indicated an increase in job satisfaction.

Current and Manitoba CSA farmers indicated crop diversity, succession planting, diversified harvesting, seed saving, consumer expectations of bug and dirt free produce and associated labour, and research and techniques required for organic production as sources for increased labour requirements.

Of the five former CSA farmers interviewed three indicated high drains on human capital, specifically labour inputs and low levels of consumer participation as contributing factors to discontinuing CSA farming. A sixth CSA farmer interviewed by Kaktins (1997) expressed similar sentiments.

As the main farmer from Farm#4 stated "It seemed like I was giving more than I was receiving... It seemed like the more I gave the more they wanted... It is definitely burnout. Every waking moment is to feed other people." A former CSA farmer indicated that "CSA didn't work out too well for us...people didn't come out and help and we got swamped with work...we were not able to make a living and we gave out more than we got back".

However a farmer from Farm#1 stated that "any kind of market garden is a lot of work, I think CSAs are less work. You can regiment yourself better with CSA... it's a great thing for us because it is an assured market and the money up front. There is a lot of work that we put into any pound of produce, it's less in Shared Farming then it would be otherwise because it is all assured and it is paid for in advance. So in the end I think economically it makes a lot of sense, all the sense for us. We pick what we know we're going to need and we deliver it and that's the end".

### **Volunteer Human Capital**

Although CSA farms appear to draw more heavily on human capital assets than do other models the concept of shareholder involvement for both educational and logistical purposes is central to the concept of CSA.

In Manitoba former and current CSAs attempting to include working shares (members receive discounted or free memberships in exchange for farm labor) have met with little success. Aside from one or two special arrangements farmers have had no successful regular working sharers and report difficulty encouraging members to visit the farm outside of annual potlucks or u picks.

Farm#1 has members who pick up their shares from the farm in return for a discounted membership. Of the members of Farm#1 who responded to the survey 52% of indicated that they had never visited the farm while 15% had visited at least once.

Farm#3 has youth volunteers and three regular member volunteers who come out weekly to assist in the packing of boxes and other farm tasks. Of the members of Farm #3 who responded to the survey 78% indicated that they had not visited the farm that year. Two former CSAs had members who occasionally visited but whose labor was not factored into planning of the running of the farm.

With the exception of Farm #2, the workers coop, all current and former Manitoba CSA farms interviewed mentioned increasing age and decreasing physical ability as a challenge in their ability to operate a CSA. In addition Farms #1, farm#4, and three former CSAs indicated decreased access to family labor as a challenge.

Location of farm in proximity to market appeared to decrease drains on human capital assets in the form of transportation and volunteers, while increased farm visits by members also assist in the development of social capital.

### **Social Capital**

In Civic Agriculture “the viability of locally- based economic systems is directly tied to the collective efforts of the communities to which they belong” (Lyson 2000, p 3).

Social capital involves the “social resources (networks, social claims, social relations, affiliations, associations” (Scoones,1998, p8) utilised by households and communities in the development of livelihood strategies.

The development of social capital is central to the CSA model. A farmer from farm#3 stated that “we really enjoy the CSA because there’s more of a connection than there is at the Farmers’ Market. The general public comes and buys a bag of potatoes or something and we don’t know anything about them. Whereas here (CSA) you make a real connection. You get to see them every week and some of them come out to the farm and you get to know each other...We get to know them in a much different way then we would if we had met them in other ways. We provide the food for them therefore we get to know them. That’s really important for us, well for me for sure.”

However this farmer consumer connection and the development of social capital may also prove to be a drain other assets. Of the five former CSA farmers interviewed three indicated “customer attitude” and unrealistic expectations as contributing factors to terminating their CSA. A former CSA farmer indicated that “members forgot why they were buying CSA and started to think of the farm as a grocery store. The demands got to be too great and they wanted more variety, longer length, and door to door delivery”.

This sentiment is echoed by the farmer from Farm#4. She states that “I loved all the families... most of them I really really enjoyed.” But the diversity of demands from members increased “Now I’m not only bringing the vegetables, now you’re wanting me

to bring eggs if I had them, if I don't have them can I find them. Can I bring the honey? Could I find them half a beef? It was too much. I was overwhelmed because I was trying to do it all...It is definitely burnout. Every waking moment is to feed other people. And what suffered during CSA is what happened [at home]. For us. Because I was so busy feeding everybody else that I didn't have time to do it properly at home."

Clearly the social capital aspects of the CSA model can increase livelihood vulnerability of some households.

### **Financial capital**

Financial Capital includes stocks of accessible money (Ellis 2000) in the form of income or credit (Brocklesby and Fisher, 2003).

Despite numerous studies existing early literature tended to treat CSAs as a unique agricultural phenomenon and initially few studies examined the economic realities of CSA. However, as the number of CSA farms increase, research in this area has begun to explore the sustainability and financial aspects of CSA. Existing economic studies of CSAs have come mainly from the United States (Kelvin, 1994, Laird 1995, Cooley and Lass, 1997, Rattan, 1998, and Lass, Rattan and Sanneh, 1999) while economic research in Canada has been limited. In reference to their paper *Alternative Financing in Agriculture: a Case for the CSA Method*, Canadian Researchers Baker and Sabih (Comeau, 1999) describe their research as "one of the first studies which looked at the financial aspect of CSA " (n.p.).

Cited economic benefits of the CSA model include the provision of a "fixed market" which renders farmers less vulnerable to decreasing demand and seasonal market prices, and prepayment of shares, decreasing the reliance on external financing for operating capital (Sabih and Baker 2000). Although not all farmers take advantage of the risk sharing aspect of CSA, the concept of sharing the harvest, bounty or crop failure, can assist farmers operating under increasingly fluctuating weather conditions.

CSAs have the potential to increase farmers economic asset options. As Robin Van En (1995), one of the founders of the CSA movement in North America states "the CSA system also gives farmers financial credibility; I know that the CSA guaranteed income helped me get my farm mortgage. When lenders see that people are willing to take this risk with farmers, they begin to take more risks and try alternatives" (p29).

However in an interview, Baker (Comeau, 1999) states "I would say that organic farmers are motivated by emotion rather than economics -- the economics tends to fall to the bottom of the list. Often, these people are subsidizing their farms through other income, although some may not realize just how much they are, in fact, subsidizing it."

At first glance this behavior would appear to contradict financial asset maximization behavior and economic assumptions such as "Individualize Economic Rationale". However as Blair (1995) states where economic assumptions indicate that individuals

behave so as to “maximize their utility (satisfaction)” (p2) these assumptions also acknowledge that “altruistic behavior can provide satisfaction to some individuals” (p4).

The farmers that have chosen to discontinue utilizing the CSA model cite economic and human capital reasons. Three of the five former CSAs found that the financial returns on human capital investments were too low and that they were not able to meet their financial needs. Two of these were full time farmer’s who entered into CSA primarily for increasing their financial asset base. One farmer stated that “the farm was my sole source of income and between the customers attitude and my labor I was going broke so I sold my property” While the other simply stated that it “wasn’t worth our while”.

In addition to drains on human capital assets the farmer from Farm#4 is discontinuing the CSA due to not only insufficient financial returns but actual drains on financial assets. She explains that “I remember from our accountant I had given him just the hours that I had kept track of and that was just when I was in the greenhouse,... the hours that I was in the garden well I forgot about all that stuff. I didn’t write down all my hours. So just with the spring hours he figured I made 65c an hour. So that means I must have went way below that because I didn’t count my hours in July, August and September. Insane.... You don’t do it strictly for the money but you have to make something to survive. When you went over the books [my husbands] wages off farm were subsidizing us feeding those families in the city. You could see it directly”

Increased scale appears to increase opportunities to develop financial assets and thus acquire external human capital, however despite the large numbers of potential members, choice and quality of life appear to be weighted highly by farmers when determining their membership size. As one CSA farmer stated “We could actually do 200 shares on this farm with the amount of land we have. We don’t just do it just because we can. It’s based on what kind of life we want to live. We base it on that.”

Given the high priority placed on choice and quality of life it appears that in order for Manitoba CSA farmer’s to make a “fair” wage with a small scale CSA they would have to charge a higher share price. However among CSA farmers concerns regarding equity and distribution of their products rank highly as a barrier to the establishment of sustainable pricing.

Most Manitoba CSA farmers have found that the CSA model provides low levels of financial return and in some cases that the model drains financial and human assets from other livelihood strategies. Despite highly valuing social and natural capital assets the majority have found the drains on financial capital too high.

Farms#1,#2, and #3 continue to utilize the CSA model. Farm#1 operates at a sufficient scale to allow for the exchange of financial capital assets for increased human capital. Both heads of the household in Farm#2 have alternative sources of income. Farm #2 is a nonprofit workers coop and can apply for grants. It operates at the largest scale of any CSA farm in the province. Farm#3 operates at a scale whereby they have sufficient human capital available within their household and through volunteer labor. Both farmers are

retired and so depend on the CSA for less than 20% of their household income. Due to scale, location, and availability of paid and/or volunteer human capital Farms #1 and #3 are able to acquire modest financial assets via the CSA method over the summer months, and have chosen to diversify their livelihood portfolios for the remainder of the year through the addition of off farm work or use of pensions.

### **Challenges with the CSA model**

Several challenges associated with the CSA model are apparent from the research. Former CSA Farmers identified challenges as low levels and seasonality of income, transportation, and higher labor inputs than other forms of distribution. Challenges with consumers included unwillingness to contribute labor to the CSA, expectations of bug and dirt free produce, greater variety and longer availability, and lack of appreciation for the philosophical underpinnings of the CSA model.

### **Conclusions**

While CSAs are not widely prevalent in North America they do represent a livelihood strategy adopted by households concerned about the current state of the environment and our food supply. CSA is not a panacea, nor has their rate of “replication and proliferation” shown them to be mistaken for such. CSA represents a niche in the field of Civic Agriculture and is only one of many options available to farm families.

The history of Shared Farming in Manitoba is in contrast to the experience of the model in other provinces such as Quebec where the CSA movement has expanded from 7 farms feeding an estimated 250 households to 38 farms feeding 2700 households (Hunter, 2002). In a survey of Michigan CSAs DeLind (2002) identified thirty two CSAs and cites a “three fold increase in four years”.

The examination of the Manitoba CSA experience through a Sustainable livelihoods framework has helped to identify the specific challenges associated with the model.

Whereas natural and physical capital assets appeared to be highly available to all CSAs, for most farms human capital assets in the form of labor (not knowledge or skills) were overtaxed to the point of shortages. While the majority of the CSAs expressed that the development of financial assets was of lesser importance than the development of social and natural assets, five CSA farms indicated the extensive draw on human assets without sufficient development (and sometimes draining) of financial assets was unsustainable. These households removed CSA from their livelihood strategies.

Based on these findings it appears that for nine farms the CSA model in Manitoba has not proven to contribute to a sustainable rural livelihood over the long term. Scoones (1998) identifies the five key elements of a sustainable livelihood activity as the creation of working days, poverty reduction, increase in well-being and capabilities (which go beyond material needs to include security, happiness, and self-esteem), a decrease in the vulnerability of a livelihood, and the sustainability of the natural resources base. For the

remaining three Shared Farms in Manitoba overall the CSA model appears to sufficiently meet these requirements to warrant its continued use as a livelihood activity.

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**Appendix A**  
**Profile of Existing Manitoba CSAs**

	Farm 1	Farm 2	Farm 3	Farm 4
Type of farm	Family farm	Workers coop	Family farm	Family farm
Asset ranking For trying CSA	Philosophy, livelihood choice and financial capital	Human capital and philosophy	Philosophy, livelihood choice and financial capital	livelihood choice, financial capital, and philosophy
Natural Capital	10 acres Own land	4 acres Donated use of land	2 acres Own land	3 acres Own land
Share #s	95	248	20	4
Farmers f/t = full time in growing season p/t = part time in growing season	2 f/t family farmers 2 f/t apprentice farmers 1 p/t farmer Volunteers(Few) Community group	1 f/t farm manager  4 f/t farm laborers	2 f/t farmer Volunteers 3 sharers Youth volunteers Woofers	1 f/t farmer 1 p/t farmer Occasional family help Woofers
Off farm income	Both Family farmers have part time off farm jobs	Main farmer	Retired	Farmer spouse has off farm job
Type of farm	Vegetable Livestock for family Some Fruit	Vegetable	Vegetable Some fruit	Mixed livestock, forage, market garden
Distance from sharers	15 km	20 km	10 km	45 km
Future	Operate with additional involvement of non family farmers	Increase number of shares and move closer location	Taking year off and seeking farmer to grow for members	Phasing out

**Appendix B**  
**Profile of Former Manitoba CSAs**

Farmer Number	Motivation for CSA farming	Dates operating	Average Sharers	Land acres	Share price	Why stopped	Off farm Job
5	Lifestyle Philosophical	1991-1995	28	2	Lg: 265 Med: 200 Sm: 125	Weather Flood	No
6	Income	1993	20	2.5	120-150	Low income Labor	No
7	Excess produce	1997-1999	10	2.25	525 for full 375 half	Income Labor Customer attitude	Partner worked
8	Excess produce Philisophical	1993-1997	10	15	200-400 (large shares)	Flood	Partner worked
9	Income	1994-1995	75	N/A	N/A	Consumer complaints Labor Low income	No
10	Philosophical	1996	<50	N/A	N/A	lack of Consumer participation Labor Low income	Partner worked
11	N/A	1993	8	5 acres	200	N/A	N/A
12	N/A	1995	N/A		N/A	N/A	N/A

**Appendix C**  
**Consumer Motivations for Joining a CSA**

Rank	Farm#1 (n=50)	Percent	Farm#3 (n=18)	Percent
1	Get Fresh Produce	34	Get Fresh Produce	63
	Want to Support local Farmer	21	Health concerns	12
	Want to Eat local produce	15	Environmental concerns	12
2	Want to eat local produce	26	Want to eat local produce	35
	Want to support local Farmer	21	Health concerns	18
	Get fresh produce	15	Get fresh produce	13
3	Support local Farmer	19	Support local farmer/ Environmental concerns	22
	Environmental concerns/cheaper Access to organic produce	17	Health concerns	18
	Get Fresh produce	11	Know where/how food is grown	12
4	Environmental concerns	23	Environmental concerns	24
	Want to Eat local produce	17	Support Local farmer/ Support a sense of community/Want to know local farmer	18
	Want to support local farmer	13	Get Fresh produce	13
5	Health	17.0	Support local Farmer	23.5
	Support a sense of community	12	Know where/how food is grown Eat local	18
	Eat local food/ Environmental concerns	11	Support a sense of community	12