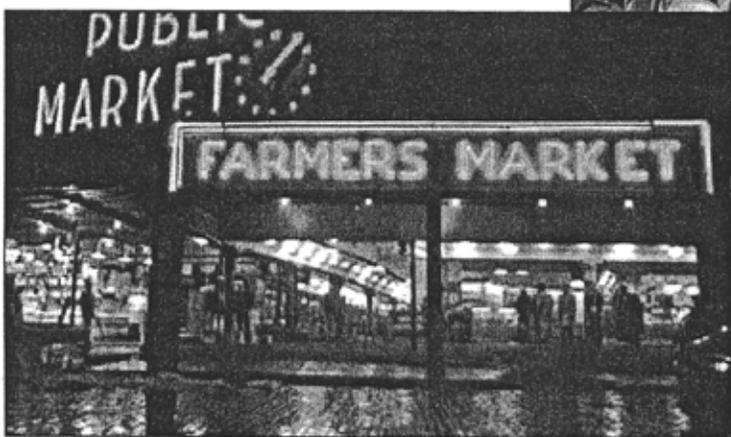
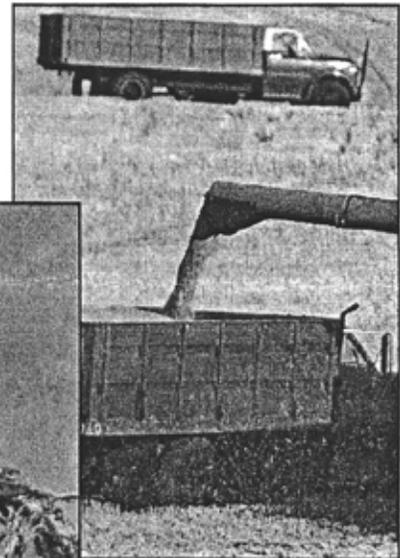
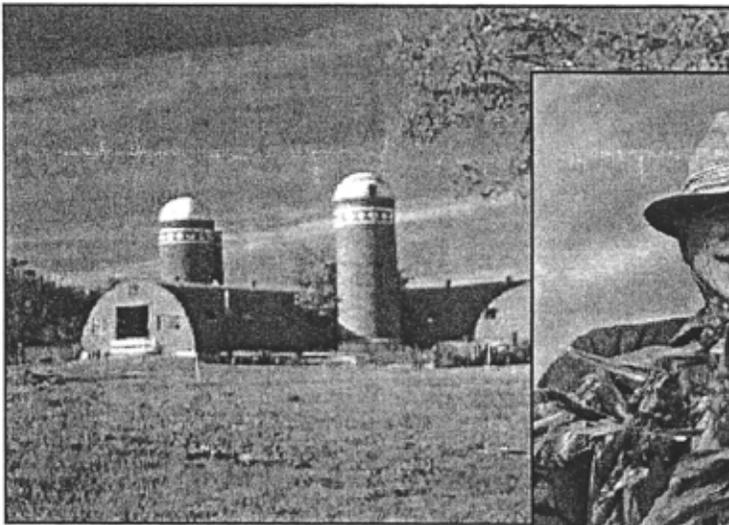


COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE 2002: THE STATE OF THE ART IN MICHIGAN

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Community Supported Agriculture in 2002: The State of the Art in Michigan

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I. Introduction

The conventional food system is failing farmers, consumers and the environment. Fructose-saturated obesity, especially in children, has reached crisis proportions. Millions of pounds of contaminated meat and meat products are being recalled regularly. Pesticide use continues to rise. Monocultural practices dependent on fossil fuels override ecological balances and biological diversity. Cheap commodities swamp markets, drown family farmers and brutalize workers, both here and abroad. All the while, the incidence (and cost) of fast food, or highly processed and packaged food continues to rise. It is not a pretty or a healthy or a sustainable picture.

In the face of these conditions many people, individually and collectively, are seeking alternative arrangements for producing and consuming life-giving food and fiber. They want, on the one hand, to escape the clutches of a faceless, industrial agriculture, and on the other, to find a safer, more secure food supply. One model that has captured local and regional imagination is community supported agriculture (CSA).

CSA allows local farmers and local residents to directly interact around the production, distribution and consumption of fresh produce. Farmers grow food for neighbors and community members, not for distant markets. CSA members, in turn, support the efforts of small-scale farmers, physically as well as financially. By investing in “one’s own” farm and “one’s own” farmer *before* the season begins, members offer to share the risks and rewards of food production. Farmers, for their part, accept the responsibility of raising food in the most regenerative, and ecologically-sound manner possible. The traditional producer/consumer antagonisms give way to a sense of mutual trust and a concern for common wealth. It is a compelling first step toward supporting small-scale, diversified farming, restoring local economies and food self-reliance, and revitalizing citizenship and communities of place.

In 1998, a SARE-funded study surveyed the CSAs in OH, MI, and IN. The publication, *The Many Faces of Community Supported Agriculture*, profiled dozens of these small, diversified and labor-intensive enterprises. While each operation was clearly unique, as a group they followed organic practices, encouraged farmer-consumer interaction, and sought ways to reintegrate food and farming into community life. Also,

as a group, they were pioneering efforts—high in spirit, low in responsibility, and thereby contributing to a more localized and democratized food system. Yet, these CSAs were fragile enterprises and despite their creativity and contrariness (or possibly because of such things), there was no guarantee that they would succeed. What, then, has happened to them, and to CSA generally, over the course of the last four years?

Prompted by these questions, we decided to resurvey the CSAs in OH, MI, and IN.¹ our purpose was two-fold. First we wanted to up-date basic CSA data for this region of the Midwest (and especially for Michigan). How many of the original CSAs still existed, how many new ones had appeared? Did they exhibit any new characteristics, significant organizational or operational changes? Unlike earlier, we were intent on observing general patterns, rather than attending to individual personalities and behavioral variations. Second, we wanted to know what types of resources and assistance CSAs needed. What would give them “staying power.” What, in other words, would help them grow more numerous, visible and viable.

We compiled our list of CSAs by consulting CSA growers and organic organizations (e.g. MOFFA, OEFFA, Sustainable Earth), by visiting individual farm web sites and searching national CSA lists and data bases (Appendix A). We found a total of 80 possible CSAs (14 for Indiana, 34 for Ohio and 32 for Michigan). We then e-mailed or wrote a letter to each contact person, who in all but two cases was also the farmer, introducing ourselves and asking for his/her participation in an hour-long, semi-structured telephone interview.

Our expectation was to begin interviewing early in February and to finish by the end of March. This did not happen. Scheduling a convenient time to talk to growers was difficult. (Farmers, it seems, take vacations in January, February, and early March). “Merely difficult” become “almost impossible,” however, as we moved into April and planting season. It was not unusual, for example, to leave six or more messages before scheduling an interview then phoning at the agreed upon time and finding no one at home. By May we gave up our game of “telephone tag,” translated the interview outline into a written questionnaire and sent it out to the last dozen CSAs. To date, five have been returned.

This difficulty, we are convinced, does not reflect indifference on the part of the CSA farmer. While many are “content to be left alone,” they are also committed, honest, enthusiastic and opinionated about what they are doing. They would sit and talk if they had the time. They simply don’t have the time. As we learned from the interviews both in 1998 and 2002, many work 10-14 hours a day for 6 to 8 months of the year. This hyper-dedication which borders on self-exploitation is an issue of no small concern for

¹ This survey was made possible by a grant from the National Farmers Union and the Michigan Farmers Union Foundation. The author would like to thank Vicki Morrone, Tara Hefferan and most especially Heather Van Wormer for their assistance conducting interviews, coding and analyzing the data that appear in this report. Their assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

the future of CSA and will be discussed later in the report. In retrospect, working visits in which interviews are conducted while both the interviewer and the farmer transplant seedlings, weed or harvest vegetables would be more productive (and more comfortable) than standard, sedentary interviews. This would not be difficult since in the great majority of cases, invitations to come visit the CSA were expressly and sincerely extended.

What follows is an overview of the CSAs in Michigan, the first summary report based on our findings:

II. CSAs in Michigan: then and now

We located thirty-two CSAs in Michigan, a number that includes the original eight found in 1998. This amounts to a three fold increase in four years, all the more impressive since it occurs at a time when farmland is “disappearing” and corporate agriculture is intensifying. We were able to interview twenty-nine of the thirty-two CSAs located, or about 90%. We found that two CSAs from the original group of eight had quit and one was taking the year off to reorganize. Of those new since 1998,² three were no longer operating as CSAs. In total, we interviewed twenty-three working CSAs, five defunct CSAs, and one “resting” CSA. Map #1 shows their distribution throughout the state.

Michigan CSAs have been in existence between one and fifteen years. The average age for all those operating in 2002 was 3.9 years.³ Six CSAs have been operating for at least seven years, while thirteen have been in existence for only one to two years (see Chart/Table 1). It is somewhat surprising to note that fourteen CSA farmers are now in their fifties (see Chart/Table 2).

The newest group of CSAs, those 1-2 years old, contains considerable demographic and economic variation. Six are being farmed by persons—several with young families—who depend on agriculture for the bulk of their household income. For them, CSA provides an opportunity to create and/or diversify markets. Four are being managed by individuals who are retired or are approaching retirement age. For them, CSA is not an economic necessity as much as it is a way to “give back to my community” and put new lifestyle priorities into practice. The remaining three CSAs are connected to 501(c)(3) organizations and through them to the issues of public welfare.

Michigan CSAs tend to be small, share-wise, the range being from three to three hundred shares with an average of 41.6 shares/CSA. Not unexpectedly, the CSAs with

² The original 1998 survey missed at least two CSAs that had been operating for several years. These are included in the “new” (i.e. since 1998) group for the purpose of “a nose count” and to avoid confusion.

³ This is noticeably less than the 5.3 year average found for CSAs nationally (Robyn Van En Center for CSA 2002).

the largest number of shares are also among the oldest (though the converse is not necessarily true). Equally obvious, those CSAs that rely most heavily on their farming income maintain the largest membership.

The growing season for Michigan CSAs averages between 18 and 22 weeks. One new enterprise offers nine month shares while one operating in an urban setting promises 13 weeks of produce, but these are the exceptions. For the majority of CSAs, a “full share” is designed for a household of four persons, though two CSAs offer only two-person shares. Well over half of Michigan’s CSAs also offer half shares as a way of accommodating members despite the additional coordination and book work. As one experienced grower observed, “What we provided for a family of four is now what a family of eight or twelve would use. [People] are not self-provisioning.” Time is certainly a factor here, but as people spend less time storing, processing and cooking their own food, they lose the knowledge and skills to do so. Without the skills to manage, even the most sympathetic CSA member can be burdened with produce (as well as a sense of guilt). These burdens, in turn, directly affect the way in which CSAs are able to operate as producers, educators, and system reformers.

The land used for Michigan’s CSAs ranges from $\frac{1}{4}$ acre to thirty-five acres. (This range is considerably greater for total farmland used and total acreage owned, the latter being one to two hundred and fifty acres.) Sixteen CSAs operate on two acres or less, the average being 4.2 acres/farm. CSA land is owned by the grower or an immediate relative in sixteen cases, by a non-profit institution (501(c)(3)) in six cases, and rented or donated in three cases (see Chart/Table 3). Purchasing farm land (especially land near population centers) is a critical and often economically paralyzing issue. Several farmers explained that they worked for a number of years as artisans and/or white collar professionals to purchase their farm land *before* they ventured into CSA. As one such grower asserted, “I am confident there is no way you can buy a farm farming it.” Several young CSA farmers, of course, are trying to do just this. They find that meeting the economic obligations of land ownership can easily dominate their lives, leaving them with little time for family or leisure. Township, county, village or city lands managed in trust or as commons could provide a more hospitable “grounding” for these small enterprises, but at present, no such arrangements have been made. In a more positive vein, it is conservatively estimated that 5,000 (and possibly as many as 8,000) Michigan residents participate in CSA, receiving a substantial portion of their seasonal produce from a total of approximately 53 acres. This statistic only underscores the vast potential inherent in intensive and locally based food production.

From these intensively farmed acres, Michigan CSAs provide a cornucopia of seasonal vegetables. Many also provide herbs, cutting flowers, berries, maple syrup and/or fruit. Ten CSAs (vs. 4 in 1998) raise or rent livestock—everything from bees to dairy cows—and thirteen offer meat or animal products (e.g., wool, lamb, fish, poultry, eggs, honey), or specialty food items (e.g., stone milled bread, mushrooms) to members.

Since 1998 there has been a diversification or “branching out” of share options. For most CSAs (16), vegetables, herbs and flowers are included in the weekly share. For eleven CSAs, however, non-edible (e.g., flowers) or “value added” (e.g., chicken, honey) items are sold separately, either by the piece or as specialty shares. Since 1998, three “multi-farm” CSAs have appeared in Michigan; one with four, one with five, and one with seventeen associated farms (see map). In these cases, small, local growers coordinate with a “hub CSA” and offer an array of unique food shares—everything from asparagus to shiitake mushrooms.⁴ Multi-farm CSAs will be discussed again in Section III below.

Because of the growing number of share options (e.g., full shares, half shares, vacation shares, canning shares) and specialty share permutations, share prices are more varied now than they were four years ago. They are also noticeably higher. Currently, full shares for 18-22 weeks range from \$0 to \$930 and average \$445/CSA. The range in 1998, by comparison, was \$50-\$650 and averaged \$400/CSA. The low end of this price range represents the cost of a full working share, an option that two CSAs offer to bolster on-farm labor and/or attract low income members. The high end, likewise, reflects one CSA’s accommodation of persons on limited means. In this particular case, all members privately pledge what they can afford until the farm budget is met. Those with “deep pockets” subsidize those with less financial flexibility. Each year, according to the grower, “the spread gets wider.” Still, few low income residents are active members of CSAs and with one notable exception, no Michigan CSA expressly welcomes low income families as participants within the farm-centered community.

Today, as was also true in 1998, the majority of shares (14) are picked up at the farm, and only at the farm. By contrast, however, there are more farms that offer an off-farm pick up option now than four years ago (i.e., 11 vs. 3). Of these, five farms have no on-farm pick-up at all, an arrangement that did not exist in 1998. In 2002, as in 1998, it is the farmer (farm employees or interns) who expend the time and labor to harvest and/or pack individual distribution baskets, bags and boxes. In only one new CSA and one original CSA do members pick and pack their own weekly shares; both of these CSAs distribute shares only on-farm and both have work requirements for members.

With respect to membership work requirements, five of the original eight CSAs had working shares or mandatory work requirements; two of these had ceased to exist by 2002. Of the new CSAs, nine experimented with working shares or work requirements. Of these, one CSA folded and three have experienced difficulty getting members to follow through on their on-farm work commitments. Of the eight CSAs with functioning work requirements, five require anywhere from four to ten hours of work/month; one requires 15 hours/season (but these hours can be bought out for

⁴ One multi-farm CSA is experimenting with non-edible, artisanal products that relate closely to the bioregion. A potter using local clays and glazes is making stoneware bowls for share purchase.

\$100.00) and two have working share options ranging from 4 to 18 hours/month. It is interesting to note that three of these eight CSAs have 501(c)(3) status.

While the majority of CSA farmers overtly welcome volunteered labor, few expect or receive much of it, though there are stories of members rallying for the occasional work party and/or coming through in an “emergency.” Members, farmers recognize, are “busy people, most of whom don’t even have the time to come out and pick up their shares.” Given this reality, several growers feel that working with members is at best an inefficient use of everyone’s time and at worst a physical and financial liability. A few new growers are even philosophically opposed to the idea of members (who they call “customers”) helping to raise the produce they will subsequently purchase. “I never liked the idea of borrowing all this money from people, making them work, and having inefficient employees.” “The point should not be to take my job and do it for me.” Sustained physical engagement, either volunteered or required, on the part of shareholders with the CSA is becoming the exception rather than the rule.

As was true in 1998, the reasons for starting and operating a CSA are multiple and varied. Growers tell stories of long standing social and environmental activism, of life crises and personal epiphanies. Yet despite intriguing personal histories, Michigan’s CSAs appear to fall into two loosely defined categories—“individually-owned and managed CSAs” and “collectively owned and managed CSAs.”

The vast majority of CSAs are private rather than group enterprises with decisions made predominantly, if not totally, by the individual grower(s). Working core groups exist and assist in the management of the CSA in only three cases. While these private enterprises strive for an environmentally sound and personally satisfying lifestyle for both growers and members, they generate and depend on little collective identity. They do not, as CSAs, foster civic engagement or activism designed to create common wealth or deliberate social change. This is in no way meant to imply that the farmers of Michigan’s privately held CSAs do not value community nor extend themselves beyond the farm for this would simply not be true. Most CSA growers are actively aware of the need for social and food system reform. To this end, they donate surplus produce to food pantries; they provide share scholarships; they host canning and other self-help type workshops, they belong to activist organizations and speak publicly. Still, these are the actions of discrete individuals and not of local residents who because they share resources and responsibilities are exercising a collective will.

By contrast, two CSAs are organized as group enterprises. For these CSAs, the membership, in full partnership with the farmer(s), makes all the essential management decisions and does so on the basis of consensus. Land, machinery, buildings, debts and programs are all owned and/or shared by the membership. They constitute a community responsibility.

An interesting variation on this “collective or cooperative” theme are those CSAs associated in some manner with a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Here CSAs are connected to a broader public mission (e.g., the promotion of social justice, food equity, agrarian history, peace, ecological spirituality). In this context, the CSA as an enterprise is imbued with a consciousness (and often with material resources) that allow it to accommodate and/or initiate programs that are civic in nature. It is interesting to note that in 1998 there were two CSAs under the sheltering wing of a 501(c)(3) organization; in 2002 there are seven.

III. Selected Changes and Analysis:

A. Risk Management

One of the hallmarks of CSA is its ability to share production and financial risk among farmers and farm members. Members accept, along with the grower, the shortfalls and windfalls that come with farming in cooperation with nature. They do so because they believe in the value this relationship holds for their bodies, their families, their communities and their futures. A CSA is not a grocery store or even an alternative to a grocery store. Theoretically, at least, members are not purchasing vegetables, but investing in a more organic or sustainable way of life. Weekly produce is a return on a long-term, place-based commitment. But, theory and practice do not necessarily coincide. CSAs, for all their potential, are embedded within the larger global marketplace and must contend with its devotion to “cheap food” and “convenience.” For many members (and even a few growers) the CSA relationship easily reduces to that of buying and selling a quality product—the exchange of “x” number of dollars for “y” amount of produce.

It is extremely difficult to alter this economic reality and mind set. CSA growers who are drawn to a more humanly-scaled and community-oriented enterprise are caught on the horns of a profound dilemma. To make a living, they are required to compete with the conventional food system (trying to distinguish their produce on the basis of quality and diversity). At the same time, they are required to assume social and educational roles that will hopefully help to re-value and re-form that system. CSA farmers or their spouses, for example, write CSA newsletters,⁵ organize farm tours and potlucks, offer canning classes, and speak publicly about the benefits of a local food system—activities designed to continually educate and recruit members. Fitting these activities into the already labor intensive routine of organic farming can easily lead to self-exploitation and burnout. As an ex-CSA farmer admitted, “The one thing that pushed me out of it—it took all the time I had.” Similarly, one practicing CSA farmer

⁵ Of the 20 CSAs with newsletters, only two are written by CSA members.

reflected, “I took six days off in December, the longest time off in four years. This is one of my concerns.”

Members, however, are under no such obligation to extend themselves. They are far less likely to allow their membership in CSA to cause them personal inconvenience. The scarcity of volunteered labor and the lack of attendance at farm parties serve as cases in point. In fact, CSA for many of its “busy” and “deskilled” members is little more than a consumable fashion statement. Heroic efforts aside, CSA growers in Michigan have not been successful in bringing forth much mutual accommodation or enduring commitment on the part of members. But then, it would be a mistake to assume that this is solely their responsibility.

Given this overall environment and the need to protect themselves, CSA growers have adopted strategies to maintain their income and minimize their risk. But, “minimizing” risk, however understandable, is not at all the same thing as “sharing” it with members or of extending ownership and responsibility in the farm operation. In fact, it appears that as farmers continue to adjust CSA practices to insure their economic viability, they are put in a position of insulating and isolating themselves from shareholders.

In 2002, for example, the great majority of CSAs (20) still required members to share production risk, to accept along with the farmer an unpredictable harvest. As more than one farmer put it, “You’ll get what I get. This ain’t Kroger’s.” By contrast, fewer than half of them (11) shared the unexpected windfall with their members. Surplus when it occurs is variously sold to members or at market for additional income (12), used by the farm family (6), or donated to a soup kitchen or similar charity(9).⁶ Its disposal, in other words, is left up to the farmer’s discretion. Retaining the surplus in this manner meshes easily with changes in the way a share is represented. In 2002 nine CSAs conceive of shares not in terms of a “food basket,” but in terms of pounds of produce. The latter is far more quantifiable and makes no specific produce promise. Technically, at least, ten pounds of zucchini is the same as two pounds each of potatoes, tomatoes, onions carrots, and peppers; both satisfy the contract. While no CSA farmer would offer only zucchini, the option (if not taken to extremes) works to lower his/her risk and quantify the producer-member obligation.

It should be noted, here that a few CSAs (3) do “purchase in” produce to compensate for shortfalls (and to satisfy members), while a few new CSAs (3) allow members to purchase only what they want, thus avoiding the issue of shortfalls altogether (i.e., “If I don’t have it, they don’t buy it.”) Either way, the trend seems to be toward regularizing and narrowing the farmer-member relationship, patters consistent with shareholders being called “customers” and “subscribers” (as opposed to “members” or “shareholders”) in at least six of the new CSAs.

⁶ Many CSAs distribute their surplus in multiple ways which is why the numbers do not add up to 29.

Moving distribution sites off the farm has a similar effect. On the one hand, it allows farmers to serve a wider geographic area and combine CSA produce delivery with other marketing activities (e.g., farmers markets). On the other hand, this “off-farm connection” together with the loss (or absence) of an on-farm work requirement, weakens a member’s physical and mental engagement with the CSA. While such behavior is understandable from a risk management standpoint, it simultaneously reinforces more market-like farmer-member relations. It is a “push-me-pull-you” situation and the independent CSA farmer is hard pressed to find a balance between serving members and lowering risk, between managing production and sharing responsibility, between personal income building and collective community building. Two arrangements, each more prevalent now than in 1998, assist with aspects of this dilemma—the multi-farm CSA and the 501(c)(3) CSA.

Multi-farm CSAs are an excellent strategy for creating a network of neighborhood or regional producers. Together, cooperating farmers turn their individual specialties into a diversity of locally adapted food and artisanal products. This cooperation expands consumer choice, attracts members, increases marketing options and small farmer income. Not incidentally, the multi-farm CSA creates a needed social support system for farmers and begins to effect the framework for a local food system. These are all good things.

What the multi-farm CSA does not do as readily, however, is deepen the member-farmer relationship or integrate the farm into the lives of its members and vice versa. Members do not know all the farmers, and are not necessarily welcome on all the farms, and are distanced physically and mentally from the realities of how their food was grown. One multi-farm CSA, for example, found that as the number of associated enterprises grew larger, members began to request that their products be organically certified, that a third party seal be used to insure quality. In addition, the convenience of “one stop shopping” and expanded consumer choice (which also individualizes and segregates food items) may have the unintended consequence of increasing market competition, enclosing local markets, and transforming an interactive membership into a buying club. While hardly an issue at present, the question of limits to the scale and scope of such regional and/or community-based activity is worth of attention.

By contrast, the second arrangement—the “502(c)(3) CSA”—shelters CSA under the auspices of a not-for-profit organization and seems to be able to retain its participatory and outreach focus. In this case, CSA farms become part of a larger programmatic vision dedicated to supporting civic life and the common good. In Michigan, several “501(c)(3) CSAs” are associated with religious orders and a few with public and private trusts. All seem to emphasize connections to a living earth and the essential value of community. While these CSAs are designed to “maintain themselves financially,” the 501(c)(3) may pay the farmer’s salary, donate land, machinery, bookkeeping, or other infrastructural services. With economic pressure somewhat

dispersed, the CSA can use its natural resources and food and farming activities as a nucleus for hands-on workshops, retreats, educational and public service programs. Only one CSA in Michigan operates as both a “multi-farm CSA” and a “501(c)(3) CSA.” Making generalizations based on this one case would be unwise. Still, it appears that the relative stability of its resources and the continuity of its programming allow the CSA to deliberately maintain a working balance between the demands of private enterprise and the responsibilities of public welfare. It seems to be able to lift some of the social and educational burden from its farmers and offer greater hands-on involvement to its members.

B. Organic Certification

In 2002, as in 1998, all Michigan CSAs stated that they believed in and followed organic farming practices. In 2002, however, the issue of certification (both state and federal) has become a concern for many growers. CSA farmers, like organic farmers nationally, are divided on the issue. Nine CSA growers indicate that they are certified organic or will apply for certification for three basic reasons. First, some view certification and maintaining national standards as a way to politically support the organic movement. They feel that it honors the grass roots struggle of thousands of small farmers and protects the integrity of the label. Second, some believe that certification will help them attract more members and allow them to charge higher prices for their produce. Third, because CSA growers may also sell to farmers markets, restaurants, etc. they need a third party seal to use the “O” word and to vouch for the quality of their produce. It is interesting to note, here, that multi-farm CSAs may have created a need for certification, since shareholders are no longer directly connected to all of the participating farms.

Those who see no reason to certify (15) also have three main arguments. Politically, some feel that the codification of the organic process serves large scale commercial interests, that organic has been reduced to a finite set of materials and techniques that can be owned and controlled by national and transnational corporations. Others find that certification is simply too expensive and involves too much paperwork. Most, however, feel that certification is simply irrelevant because CSA members can “see for themselves” how their food is being grown. As one farmer explained, “Even if we can not use the term organic, it will not change our relationship to how we grow or to the quality of the food we produce.” The farm/CSA name, she feels, now has the integrity (i.e., is trusted) to serve as its own label. It would seem that those who do not certify tacitly expect more mental if not physical involvement on the part of members.

C. Community integration and outreach

Michigan CSAs, as CSAs, show only limited civic involvement. A few encourage children to plant gardens and/or offer space for independent student or citizen research.

A few provide public opportunities to learn first hand about such things as alternative energy, seed saving, health and healing. A few coordinate with local groups—from jazz bands to homeless shelters—to sponsor specific public events. Yet, these programs and events, as worthy as they are, tend to be discrete and occasional. The “501(c)(3) CSAs,” by contrast, seem to be able to commit to programs on a more enduring basis. Several, for example, work closely with youth at risk or dedicate themselves to hunger relief that extends beyond charitable giving. Still, only one 501(c)(3) anticipates sharing resources with and integrating itself into local government. None, as yet, serve as a “third place,” a place that functions, according to Ray Oldenberg, as a “core setting of informal public life” (xvi).

All of this is totally understandable. Making a living from the land is difficult. Building community and educating the public is also difficult. It is unfair and unproductive to assume that the CSA farmer can (or should) do both simultaneously. Indeed, as Groh and McFadden (1990) envisioned it over 10 years ago, CSA is not the farmer’s responsibility but a community responsibility, the benefits requiring cooperation and sacrifice on everyone’s part.

“We have no choice about whether to farm or not, as we have a choice about whether to produce T.V. sets or not. So we have to either farm or to support farmers, everyone of us, at any cost. We cannot give it up because it is inconvenient or unprofitable.” (xv/6)

Without long-term, embodied membership and wider community commitment, CSAs can not realize their civic potential and farmers will be pressured to focus increasingly on market relations. This, in turn, will reduce the need for members to get involved and reinforce the need to commoditize not just farm products but the farming experience itself. Disrupting and displacing this cycle is a challenge for which CSA advocates could use assistance.

IV. Expressed Recommendations and Needs

When CSA farmers were asked what type of assistance they needed to support their farms and the local food movement generally, their primary response was “education.” This need they allowed was for both *public education* and *self education*. With respect to public education, CSA farmers wanted the public-at-large to understand the “corruption” and the contradictions that exist within the present food system. They wanted people to understand that local organic was not the same as corporate organic—environmentally, nutritionally, or ethically. One grower wondered, for example, whether the average consumer of organic foods ever thought about farm workers—if their healthy organic vegetables were raised by Mexican laborers living in cardboard boxes. Several farmers bluntly stated that “people don’t care about what they eat as long

as their stomachs are full.” Still it was clear from their suggestions that they wanted to find ways to overcome the ubiquitous “cheap food” and “convenience is everything” mentality. One farmer went so far as to say, “We need a social revolution. We might as well say we need a spiritual revolution too.”

CSA farmers offered a pied array of suggestions for creating such change. Several (5) felt that CSAs needed help getting into public schools and working with children. They wanted to assist (and be assisted in) developing food and farm related curriculum for elementary and middle school students. Others (5) felt that CSAs needed to be represented at township and county board meetings—that local officials had to be made to understand their meaning and purpose. CSAs needed to push for public farm land, land trusts and “farm parks.” “We have parks for grass, parks for recreation, why not parks for farming?” Others saw a need for changing local zoning ordinances to allow small-scale diversified agriculture to become an integral part of suburban and urban communities. As one passionate farmer challenged, “If we do not build local connections and relationships, then we will eat organic agribusiness.”

Eight CSAs felt that farm tours would raise public awareness. One wanted more published directories, two felt that CSAs should have booths at county fairs and festivals, three felt the need to “draw in” conventional commercial farmers, still another felt that CSAs should educate Extension. “Extension knows the word, but not the concept.”

But who would do this lobbying and educating? It was clear that farmers wanted some programmatic assistance. “It’s too much for us to be that voice in the community. We do by example ... [We] need a community resource person.” One farmer suggested hiring a writer who could “verbalize what we are trying to do to government leaders.” Three others wanted grant writers. Several farmers saw the need to hire a state or regional public educator. A surprising number (5) felt that they needed a MACSAC⁷-like organization, one that would have the superstructure to coordinate political, educational, and cooperative programs and campaigns on behalf of CSA.

With respect to self education, sixteen farmers saw a need for an annual conference. Though their reasons for such a meeting varied—for inspiration, for reviewing different CSA models, for learning growing techniques, for sharing “nuts and bolts” information—their enthusiasm was consistent. One CSA farmer, however, cautioned that meetings had to offer a clear set of benefits; meeting for the sake of meeting was not acceptable.

CSA farmers also wanted MSU to conduct more research into “smaller-scale, diversified production.” They wanted information on scale appropriate and ergonomically appropriate tools, on food crop storage, on creating niche products.

⁷ Madison Area Community Supported Agriculture Coalition.

Their concerns were not for commercial expansion, but for economic stability. One farmer wanted research on the economic viability of CSA. “Is there a good economic model out there or not?” he asked. “Is this a way to make a decent living for people?” Still another farmer felt that CSA should be part of MSU curriculum. “A farm is a great metaphor for life.’ Such a program, she felt, would also generate qualified interns; people who knew how to work.

With respect to interns, another farmer saw the need for an independent, possibly state-wide, program that would serve as a clearing house for trained interns. Others saw the need for traveling workshops complete with paid workshop leaders to present information on a variety of topics, but especially on multi-farm CSAs. Another farmer wanted more local organic suppliers, sources for potting soil, sprays and amendments. Here, too, it was felt that a MACSAC-like organization could coordinate these needs and facilitate the sharing of equipment, seed orders, transportation, etc. among farms.

These suggestions for assistance reflect not only the growing diversity of Michigan CSAs, but also an awareness on the part of CSA growers of their growing presence within the state. No longer curiosities, CSAs are gaining a sense of their collective identity—and their collective strength. CSAs have begun to cluster in several distinct regions of Michigan (e.g. around Traverse City, Detroit, and Ann Arbor). And they have begun to pragmatically cooperate to secure and generate both public and private benefits—not the least of which is local food for Michigan. CSA advocates already demonstrate a sophistication and a willingness to address their needs and to help themselves. What they feel they need, at this point in time, is a non-governmental, not-for-profit organization that can speak for CSAs generally and coordinate many of their on-farm needs and extra-farm responsibilities. Such an organization would permanently and consistently manage long, short, and mid-range programs, everything from developing handouts, to coordinating interns, to securing agricultural lands. It would provide the material supports and the social and political “spaces” with which and within which individual CSAs could go about their business of growing good food and embedding themselves deeper into community life (and vice versa). MACSAC is certainly one organizational model. There are undoubtedly others. Finding the most appropriate model, one that will protect the integrity of diverse, small, place-based enterprises *and* craft and coordinate friendly state-level programs and policies, will require considerable dialogue and negotiation. The challenge now will be to find the time, somewhere between January and March, to bring interested CSA farmers, members, and community residents together to get the process rolling.

Works Cited

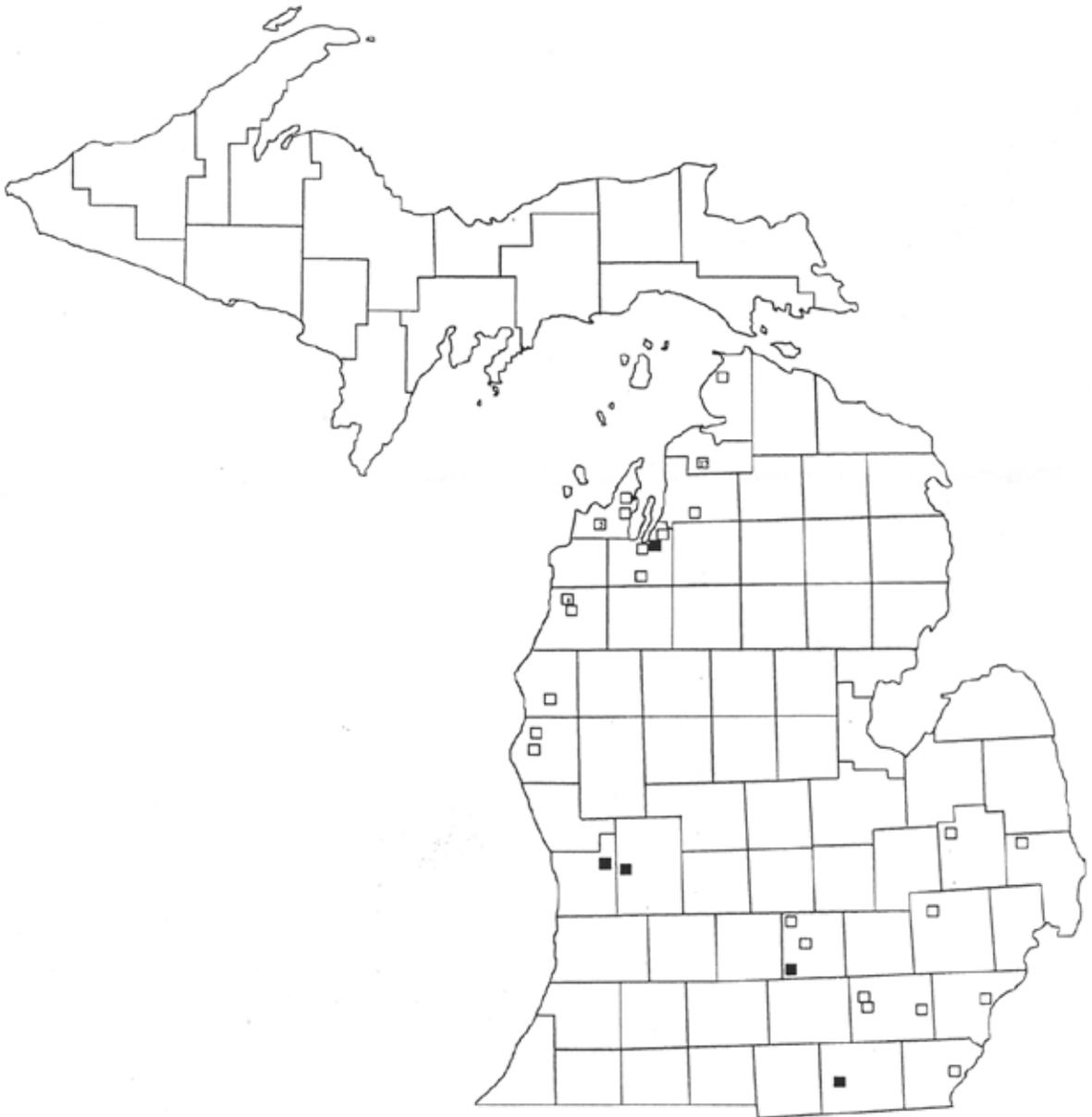
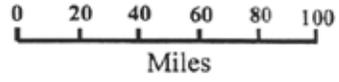
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Appendix A

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| Alternative Farming Systems
Information Center
http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/CSA/ | Ohio Ecological Food and Farm
Association
http://www.oeffa.org |
| Sustainable Agriculture Network
http://www.sare.org/csa/ | Green People
http://greenpeople.org |
| Economic Research Service
http://www.ers.usda.gov/whatsnew | Organic Consumers Association
http://www.organicconsumers.org/csa.html |
| Robyn Van En Center for CSA
http://www.csacenter.org | |
| Food Routes
http://www.foodroutes.org/localfood/ | |
| Grass-roots.org
http://grass-roots.org/localfood/ | |
| Local Harvest
http://www.localharvest.org/ | |
| Biodynamics Association
http://www.biodynamics.com/csa2.html | |

Michigan CSAs

- Still CSA
- No longer CSA
- # Multi-Farm CSA



Own land?	
farmer	16
501c3	6
rented	2

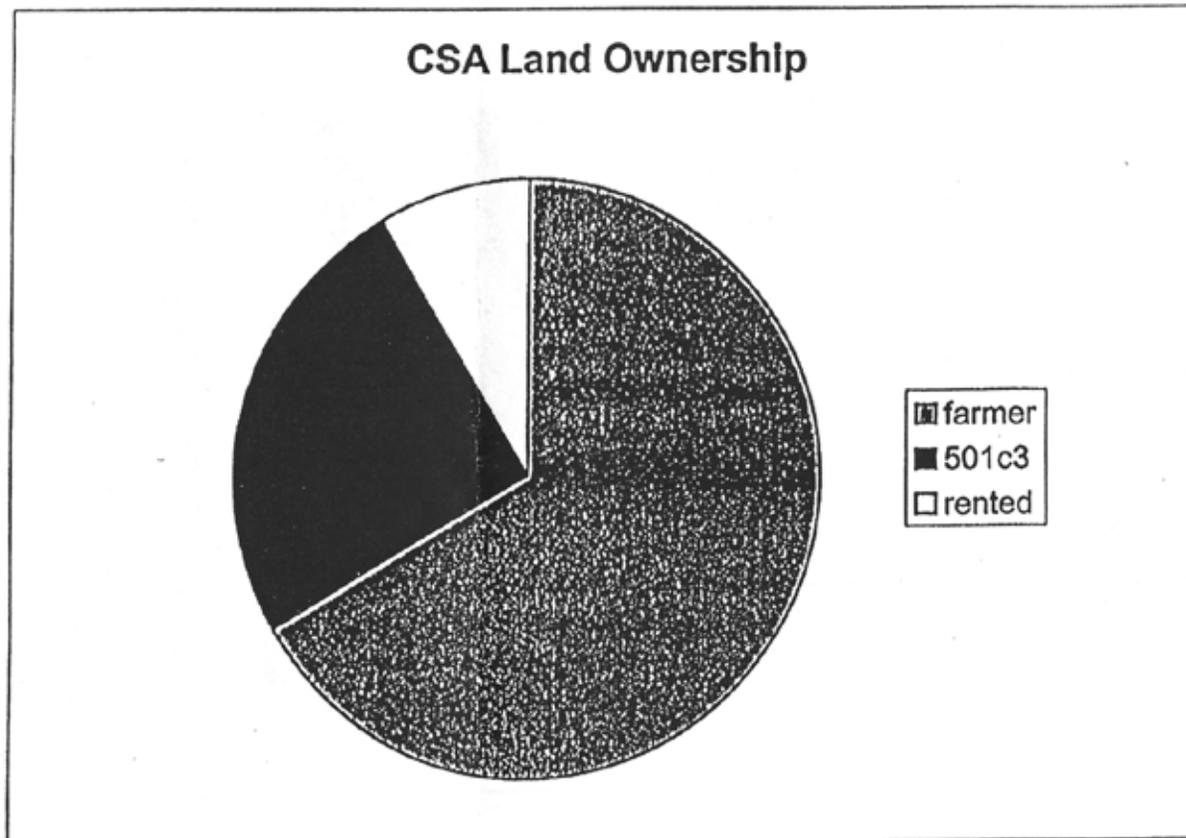


Table 3 and Chart 3: Michigan CSAs: Land Ownership, 2002.

# years	# CSA
1	7
2	9
3	2
4	2
5	3
6	0
7	1
8	2
9	1
10	0
11	1
12	0
13	0
14	0
15	1

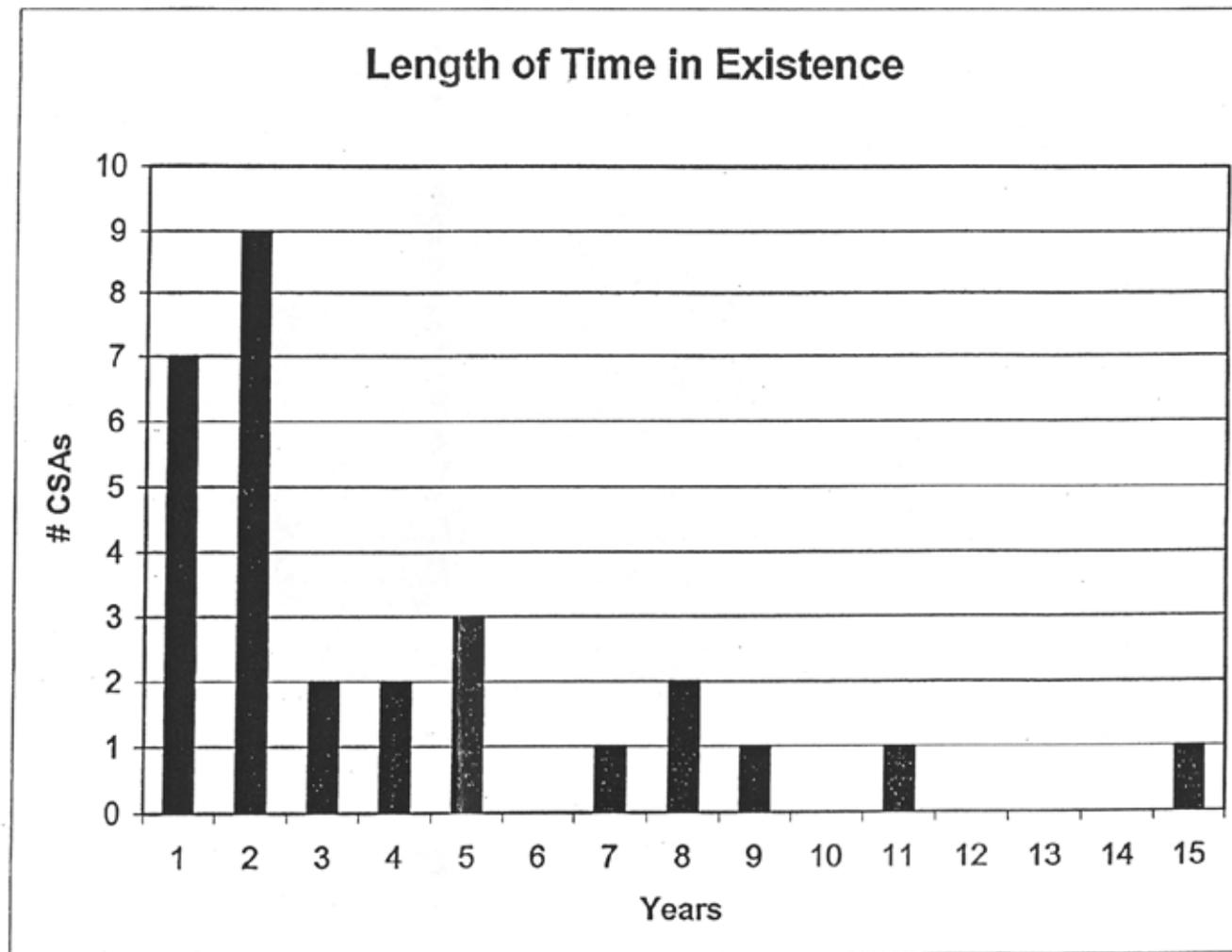


Table 1 and Chart 1: Michigan CSAs: Length of Time in Existence, 2002.

Age group	# growers
20s	1
30s	7
40s	5
50s	14
60s	1
unknown	1

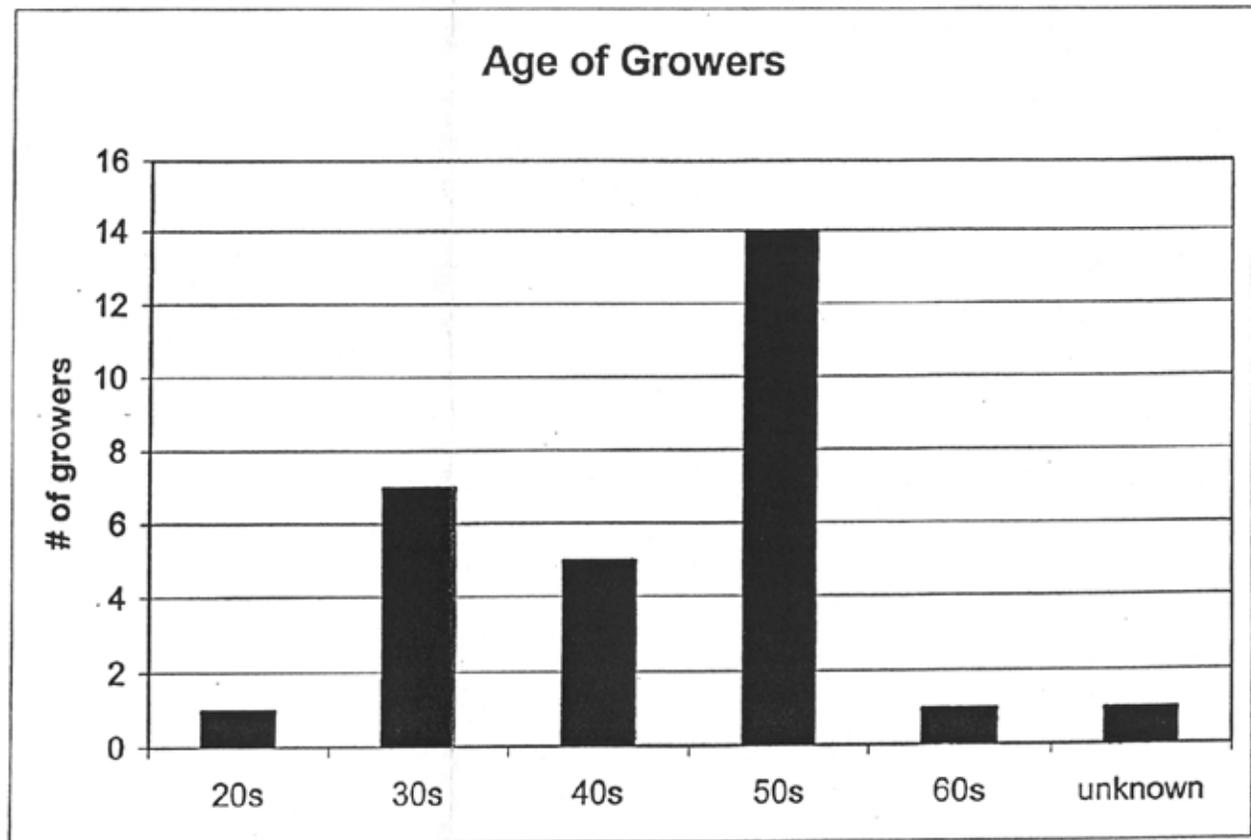


Table 2 and Chart 2: Michigan CSAs: Age of Growers, 2002.

**Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)
2002 Michigan Data Sheet
prepared by Laura B. DeLind**



Number of CSAs existing in 2002:
27 CSAs identified
25 surveyed
(data below is based on this population)



Number of shares:
3-300 shares
average of 41.6 shares/ CSA



Years in Existence:
1-15 years
average of 3.9 years/ CSA
16 CSAs are 1-2 years old



Share price:
\$0-\$930
average \$445 (4 person share)/ CSA



Land used in CSA production:
¼ acre- 35 acres
average 4.2 acres/ CSA
18 CSAs operate on 2 acres or less



Member work requirements:
8 CSAs have membership work requirements
requirements range from 4 hrs/ mo. to 18 hrs/ mo.



Land ownership:
18 CSAs operate on land owned by the farmer
5 CSAs operate on land owned by a 501c3 organization
2 CSAs operate on land that is rented or donated



Seven CSAs are associated with a *non-profit* (501c3) organization.
Three CSAs are *multi-farm* CSAs, coordinating from 4 to 17 farms.