

Community supported agriculture (CSA) as a transformational act—distinct values and multiple motivations among farmers and consumers

Christine Hvitsand

To cite this article: Christine Hvitsand (2016) Community supported agriculture (CSA) as a transformational act—distinct values and multiple motivations among farmers and consumers, *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems*, 40:4, 333-351, DOI: [10.1080/21683565.2015.1136720](https://doi.org/10.1080/21683565.2015.1136720)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21683565.2015.1136720>



Accepted author version posted online: 05 Jan 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 30



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Community supported agriculture (CSA) as a transformational act—distinct values and multiple motivations among farmers and consumers

Christine Hvitsand 

Telemark Research Institute, Centre for Nature and Culture Based Innovation, Bø in Telemark, Norway

ABSTRACT

Compared to most other wealthy countries, Norwegian producers and consumers have been somewhat sheltered from the international market, but this has changed over the last decades. As a response to these changes, the number of community supported agriculture (CSA) farms, has grown rapidly in Norway. This article reveals, in depth, why Norwegian producers and consumers engage in CSA and how CSA can be seen as a transformational act toward food system changes. The study reveals that the Norwegian CSA producers, and consumers in general, have distinct values and are motivated by a desire of a production and food system, that safeguards aspects of environment, justice, health, participation, and communication. For them, the farms are an arena for converting societal values into practical actions. The sustainable production methods practiced—and the reallocation of power back to the producers, consumers, and local community—are indicative of the transformational power CSA has had upon the current agri-food system regime. However, the challenge is to upscale these actions, as well as prevent dilution of the core values and agroecological practices seen in the Norwegian CSAs.

KEYWORDS

Agroecology; community supported agriculture (CSA); current food regime; power relations; transformational act; values and motivations

Introduction

The concept of community supported agriculture (CSA) has over just the last few years started to emerge rapidly in Norway. Due to a diversity of agricultural and regional policy instruments, in order to maintain domestic food production and settlement in rural areas, Norway has, until recently, been somehow sheltered from the “worst” of globalization. Additionally, the producer-owned cooperatives have made farmers less vulnerable to external influences by guaranteeing receipt of products even from the most secluded and small farms as long as the products meet the set standards (Sørensen and Tennbakk 2002). A Norwegian survey shows that the farmers appreciate that the cooperatives are reducing their economic risks, yet, at the same time, the farmers experience fewer returns in mass production and are unsatisfied

about the development in the cooperatives (Veidal 2011). Many factors are currently altering the relations between producers and consumers (the rural and the urban), such as the continuing industrialization of domestic production due to international competition (Almås, Bratberg, and Syverud 2014; Borgen, Røkholt, and Sørensen 2006), the increased import of feed and food, development of urban agricultural areas, depopulation of rural areas, and incidents of food scandals (Knutsen 2013; Storstad and Bjørkhaug 2003).

This described situation has led to an increasing demand for local and niche food with added values, and is an important driving force for entrepreneurship in agri-business and the development of alternative food networks, as well as a multifunctional agriculture (Knutsen 2013; Norwegian Agricultural Agency 2014; Zasada 2011). CSA is one such solution.

Many scholars have studied the phenomenon of CSA from different perspectives, but there has not been any in-depth study of the producers and consumers within the CSA movement in Norway or in other Nordic countries. Compared to countries where most other studies have been done, Norway has a relatively large part of the population not living in cities, and many people have some sort of relation to agriculture or ruralness, even though living in urban areas. Further, there is a general engagement from all societal levels in sustaining communities and livelihoods, which might have an influence on values and motivations for initiating or joining a CSA.

Gliessman (2014) notes that there is a need for examples of “transformational” agroecology. This article has the ambition of being such a contribution by presenting how arrangements of CSA diverge from the current agri-food regime and represent a redesign of the food system (c.f. Méndez, Bacon, and Cohen 2013). Further, “transformational” is interpreted in the meaning of being a critique of the current agro-food regime, and “committed to a more just and sustainable future by re-shaping power relations from farm to table (Méndez, Bacon, and Cohen 2013:12).

To investigate the phenomena of CSA further, this article poses the questions:

- Why do people engage in CSA?
- How can CSA be a transformational act for producers and consumers toward food system changes?

The potential for changes in existing regimes will be explored in this article by discovering values, attitudes, and motivations among producers and consumers involved in CSA in Norway, and discussing this in relation to previous international studies and the Norwegian context. The research questions were explored through case studies at five Norwegian CSA farms and by a survey of CSA members at seven farms.

Transformation of current agri-food regimes

According to Lyson and Green (1999), “the balance between local self-sufficiency and global dependence needs to come back towards the local, rather than continuing on its present trajectory towards the global” in order to sustain agriculture communities (146). Local food systems are characterized by smaller and diverse farms, trust, and networks rather than a few larger and specialized farms, large corporations, and lack of power for farmers, consumers, and local communities to shape their development. And as Torjusen (2004) points out: Trust is fragile and subject to reassessments and changes. Today consumers have declined trust in food when it comes to environment, health, and animal welfare, reinforced by incidents of food scandals in the industrialized and globalized food systems (Renting, Marsden, and Banks 2003; Terragni, Torjusen, and Vittersø 2009; Lamine and Bellon 2009). Simultaneously, there is an increasing demand for greater variety of food that safeguards immaterial quality aspects. As argued, even organic production is generally practiced within the frames of industrialized agriculture with monocultures and dependency on external input, and organic products also as part of the globalized food system distributed to consumer through regular food supply chains of the mass food market. For example, Renting, Marsden, and Banks (2003), Feagan (2007) and Torjusen, Lieblein, and Vittersø (2008) all explain that the industrial production and long food supply chains are pushing organic farming away from its original ideology and disentangling it from the locality. Together these factors are resulting in the emergence of *alternative food networks* with short food supply chains like farmers’ markets, farm shops, subscription box schemes, and CSA. These arrangements are allowing closer relationships between producer and consumer and are to a larger extent supporting sustainable farming and consumption. In Norway, these short food supply chains are increasing the selection of organic food compared to purchases from grocery stores (Skjelvik et al. 2012), unlike what is explained by Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007).

The model of CSA is a way of direct communication and distribution of agricultural products between the farm and the consumer, operating outside the regular market (Henderson and Van En 2007; Soil Association 2014; Hvitsand 2014). In CSA, the consumers buy a share of the production, and the partnership includes sharing the risks and benefits of variations of yields with the farmer. In various degrees, members participate in activities such as growing, harvesting, and different events for social and educational purposes. Involvement in decisions about economy and production are also an opportunity, especially at consumer-driven farms.

In general, arrangements of CSAs operate under the *agroecological* concept, which is regarded as to have the potential to accommodate both changes in

agronomy and in society in a sustainable direction (Levidow, Pimbert, and Vanloqueren 2014; Wezel et al. 2009). According to Méndez, Bacon, and Cohen (2013), the agroecological approach is both a long-term oriented focus on the overall design and building of soil fertility, as well as a facilitator of intergenerational benefits, learning, and quality of life. Furthermore, it has the potential to be participatory and action oriented, as well as to accommodate transformations in agro-food systems. An agroecological system is a *redesigned* production system, enhancing playing on the same team as nature with mixed crops, crop rotations, and a focus on nutrient cycling. This is described as a further step in the trajectories within organic farming, as the farmer's transitional process moves forward by learning and participating in new networks. Thus, a confluence of social movements toward sustainable production and consumption (such as alternative food networks and CSA) and agroecological practice (at its best), can contribute to driving toward sustainable food systems (Fernandez et al. 2012).

Previous studies on motivations for CSA

When it comes to farm economy, the general experience seems to be that the income from CSA is moderate, but predictable, as the payments are coming in advance of the growing season (Henderson and Robyn 2007; Soil Association 2014). Studies from the United States (Tegtmeier and Duffy 2005; Lizio and Lass 2005) and the United Kingdom (SERIO 2012) show that CSA farmers have better income than regular farmers. Additionally, the U.S. National CSA Survey of 2001 found that a majority of CSA farmers felt that the CSA was helping to “improve the ability to meet farm costs, their own compensation, their quality of life, their ability to maintain and improve soil quality and community involvement” (Lass et al. 2003). These studies are likely to have strong implications for motivations for being a CSA farm or to recommend others to do it, especially as Lass et al. (2003) reveals that CSA as a “grassroots movement” mainly consists of relatively small-scale farmers willing to strengthen the movement as a whole. Furthermore, Thompson and Gokcen (2007) have identified forming a CSA as a defiant political act among CSA farmers, regarding their farm's viability if still operating within the framework of the current economic and corporate forces. However, being as ideologically oriented and dedicated as many CSA farmers might be also has a price in the form of self-exploitation and loss of motivation, even though share prices supposedly cover all expenses, including extra labor if necessary (Henderson and Robyn 2007; Galt 2013).

As well as farmers, members seem to profit economically by joining a CSA scheme compared to acquiring the same products at a store (Brown and Miller 2008). However, economic benefit does not seem to be a significant driving force behind becoming a member. According to Kolodinsky and

Pelch (1997), the probability of becoming a member of a CSA increases if a consumer is both that of organic products and holds particular environmental values. Likewise, Brehm and Eisenhauer (2008) find the strongest motivations for joining a CSA to be concerns over the quality of food and how it is produced, while building new social networks seems to be less important. Also, members are generally environmentally oriented have a sense of community attachment and a desire to support their local economy. Thus, Brehm and Eisenhauer (2008) argue that joining the CSA might be “one means to continue to improve their community and retain their high level of satisfaction with their community as a place to live” (110).

According to Thompson and Gokcen (2007), members enjoy being involved in manual work and are part of do-it-yourself (DIY) trend. Additionally, both consumers and farmers appreciate the variation and surprises that come from the field, cultivating the feelings of enchantment by encouraging cooking with fresh produce, trying new recipes and diverging from the efficient and routinized preparation and consumption of food.

Thus, several studies of members’ motivation for participating in a CSA scheme coincide, finding concern for ethics and the environment, supporting local agriculture, and accessing local food as important drivers (O’Hara and Stagl 2002; Cox et al. 2008; Brehm and Eisenhauer 2008). At the same time, these consumers put forward a critique of the current global and capitalistic food system. Thompson and Gokcen (2007) argue that participating in a CSA scheme is a form of *ethical consumerism* and of re-territorializing the market system by removing the boundaries between the metropolitan and the rural. Further, CSA “ideologically frame the meanings and social significance of locally grown produce, small organic farms and the community-generating power of food” (277). Terragni, Torjusen, and Vittersø (2009) explain how joining a CSA might be a way of taking some organic consumers a further step away from the mainstream, and “by participating in forms of alternative food consumption people may contribute to defining the agenda of the relevant problems that our society faces and have to cope with, as well as expressing their values and aspirations” (12).

Methods

This study is based on research of Norwegian CSA farms and consists of a) interviews of key stakeholders at five CSA farms and b) an electronic survey sent to CSA members at seven farms—two of them additional to where the interviews took place. These farms are scattered around the country, but the majority were located in the more populated areas in the eastern part of the country and close to densely populated areas. (Hvitsand 2014). The data was collected during the summer and autumn of 2013 and the winter of 2014.

Case studies

Five CSA farms in Norway were studied from the view of producers (farmers and growers), scheme managers, and core group members, with differences from each farm in relation to their organizational structure. Two of the farms were farmer driven with no core group or manager and, at these farms, the farmer was the main informant. In Norway, there were only four CSA farms until 2013; all these farms are included in the sample. In addition, we included one farm established in 2013 even though their experience with CSA was limited. The farms were visited and the interviews took place as individual or group interviews with the use of semistructured interview guides. Some of the informants were given follow-up phone calls. In addition to interviews, websites, Facebook pages, and other CSA documents were studied. All together, these gave the views of both the production side and the consumer side in relation to background, organization and production, values, motivations, participation, experiences, and challenges. Additionally, a focus group discussion was arranged during a network meeting for Norwegian CSA farms.

Survey to CSA members

In addition to the five case study farms, members at two more CSA farms in Norway received the survey by e-mail. The average response rate was 60.2%, ranging from 52.6 to 78.8% among the farms, and with a total number of 449 respondents completing the questionnaire (done by one adult representative in the household). The survey asked about socioeconomic variables and facts such as distance from home to the farm, duration of membership, degree of participation, and to what extent they depended on the farm to cover their consumption of different food groups. The survey covered attitudes and values, motivations and experienced changes in awareness, environmental practices, social factors, and knowledge. The survey consisted of both closed- and open-ended questions, the latter in order to get a deeper insight into some specific topics.

This article focuses on the results related to attitudes and values among CSA producers and consumers, as well as motivations for joining, or even initiating, a CSA farm.

Values and motivations among Norwegian CSA actors

Norwegian CSA producers want changes

The farmers and growers argue for the CSA model both on the basis of political arguments related to how food is produced and the way today's food system is working, as well as for the sake of their own economic, professional, and social situation. As a common thread, they are opposed to industrialized

agriculture with chemical pesticides and fertilizers, monocultures, and the amount of food wastage created in the attempt to meet aesthetic standards when delivering through the regular food supply chain—some of these practices are even prevalent in organic farming and food systems. The producers are also seek alternatives to industrialized organic agriculture, the global food system, and traditional distribution channels, with food security also seen as important. Further, they are express concerns about sustaining a viable Norwegian production, and often uses the terms of “food security” and “self-sufficiency” to explain the necessity of locally based and transparent food systems.

One farmer argues that the cooperatives have, in many ways, secured small farmers’ incomes, but at the same time being an intermediary, creating distance between producer and consumer, as well as being part of the system that requires standardized products. Another farmer says this about the situation after his first season with parts of his business as a CSA farm, and with plans of terminate all other supply contracts and convert the whole farm into a CSA:

I own a potato machine worth several hundreds of thousands NOK [Norwegian Krone], have employees and plenty of money in circulation, but am not left with much myself. Prices vary, also with the conventional prices. We are running industrial farming in a small-scale world. We get the animal feed from the other side of the world, we have monocultures and enormous machines, and this doesn’t belong in our agriculture. Labor is expensive. You are supposed to do very good at one product. We don’t have any relation to the consumer, like cultivating products that are nutritious and perfectly clean. In Norway we have had a special situation with the farmer owned cooperatives both for the good and bad.

This quote tells us that the farmer feels uncomfortable and alienated by today’s forms of agriculture. The next summer, virtually the entire farm was run as a CSA with more than 200 members. Instead of delivering grain to wholesalers, the farmer had invested in a small grain mill, and the pigs and hens are used to help clean and aerate the soil and produce fertilizer. This farm is now supporting members with vegetables, legumes and other greens, as well as flour, eggs, and meat, and offers fishing in the river that flows through the farm.

The farmers and growers in our study were organic or biodynamic producers before engaging in CSA, but now increased the diversity in production methods and the selection of plants (about 30 different varieties at each farm). This diversity is explained as part of taking care of soil health and using nature’s own methods of handling pests and threats—and the farmers and growers appreciate the new agronomic challenges. Further, the farms use local, mainly organic, manure in production and focus on nutrient cycling and wastage reduction. In fact, two of the farmers estimated the wastage of organic carrots/potatoes to be as high as 50% when they previously delivered

to wholesalers. On the contrary, they tell that many CSA members are in fact appreciating the different shapes and sizes of products, and the general diversity that they pick up at the field.

The farmers and growers at the case study farms wanted to have more dialogue with the people who actually eat what they produce, and the CSA model allows and facilitates such interaction. This has brought them a more social and challenging workday, with exchange of knowledge and experiences about things such as the cultivation and usage of “new” and seasonal plants as well as the use of more parts of the plants. The dialogue also ensures satisfaction and consistency between supply and demand, which is not necessarily the case in the large-scale food market where there is no direct contact between the supplier and buyer. Members receive newsletters about what is ready to harvest as well as necessary practical work. These newsletters to different degrees also contain tips about how to use the produce, information about meetings and arrangements, as well as the ongoing process of sowing, planting, and growing. Additionally, some farmers and members are active on social media bringing forth the idea of CSA and spreading information on different arrangements and campaigns, as well as participating in general exchanges of worldviews. Some of the farms actively share information about professional challenges and possibilities, seed procurement and plant breeding, and other practical and organizational questions. Additionally, they help with professional support for new CSA growers and farmers, as competence in agroecological growing practices generally is scarce.

The farmers and growers have a strong belief that CSA is the best way of farming for themselves. When it comes to economic considerations, changing from “regular” farming to CSA is argued to be less capital intensive and more predictable because the payments come in advance. The model ensures that the income is not subject to fluctuating yields, as the shares represent a part of the yield and not a certain amount of products. They find the CSA model very attractive and capable of being a livelihood if practiced as intended, that is, a share price that includes all costs of production and to have a proper number of members. However, in practice, it seems like the farmers at the producer-driven CSAs have internal barriers for claiming a high enough share price and to actually share the risks for fluctuating yields with the members. As a consequence, it was expressed at one of these farms, that there is a risk of self-exploitation because of the workload. On the other side, hired farmers in the consumer-driven CSAs claim that they earn more working for the CSA than at their own farm or when hired elsewhere. This is a result of members budgeting the salaries to a level that they believe the growers deserve.

CSA members with distinct values and multiple motivations

Nearly 40% of the households also have children and youth included in the membership. Members are, in general, highly educated, with 93 of the households having at least one adult with higher education. Members mainly live in urban or urban-like areas (95%), and eat less meat and fish than the average Norwegian. (The Vegetarian Association [2015] assumes around 2% to be vegetarian/vegan. In our sample, 5% claim to be vegetarian/vegan and 22% to eat just a little fish/meat.)

Sixty seven percent of the households answering the questions have participated in activities related to their CSA farm, the most common being harvesting and weeding. Other usual activities include sowing and planting and taking part in social and educational arrangements, like Thanksgiving get-togethers or thematic meetings and courses. Additionally, one fifth of the active members have participated at annual meetings and such and, thus, had a democratic voice on how the farm is run regarding such as what to produce the next season and economic dispositions and priorities.

Attitudes and values

Figure 1 illustrates to what degree the members agree about different statements related to their own attitudes and values on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*).

The statement “Finding it meaningful to grow your own food” is given the highest average score (5.5), which clearly tells that members value the aspects of transparency and participation. Supportive of this finding is the high score (5.1) of the statement “It’s not just the food that is important about CSA, but also the experience.” There is also a general agreement that politicians should prioritize environmental issues to a greater extent (5.4), they find it important to support local agriculture (5.3) and they do not find any contradiction in reduced consumption and increased quality of life (5.2), which implies that they are conscious consumers. Additionally, members are quite worried about pesticide residues (4.9), and being a CSA member is considered quite an important environmental measure for them (4.3). Further, there is, on average, an agreement that there should be a reduction in consumption of meat in favor of environment, health, and animals (4.6). When it comes to economy, members show a willingness to pay more for food from a CSA than elsewhere (5.0), but, at the same time, there is general agreement that organic food is cheaper from the farm than in the grocery (4.2).

Motivations

Members were presented different possible motivations for joining the CSA, and they could state whether a specific motivation was important or not on a

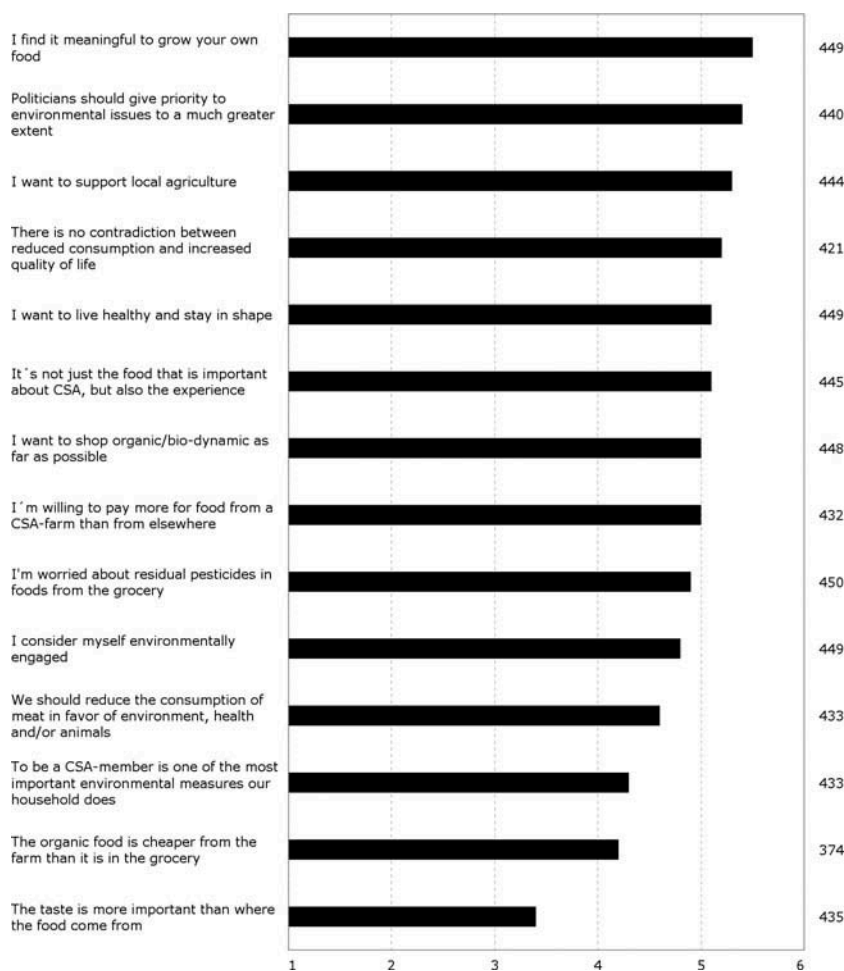


Figure 1. Attitudes and values among members. The statements are given scores on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Average score on the statements given by the sample.

scale from 1 (*not important*) to 6 (*very important*). As seen in **Figure 2**, members have a complex set of motivations for connecting to a CSA.

Most important, however, is getting better access to local food (average score of 5.5). Further, consumers want to increase their consumption of organic food (5.3) and have a better selection of organic food (5.2) or biodynamic grown food (4.5). In addition, there are high scores on the desire to support environmentally friendly practices (5.1), promotion of local soil resource management and local knowledge (5.1), and support of local business and value generation (4.8). Another important motivation for being a member is the desire to take part in growing their own food (5.0) and (but to a less degree) for the family to learn about agriculture and ecology (4.4 on average, but a noteworthy 4.9 for those with children in the household). The desire to be part of a social community related to food is on average not seen

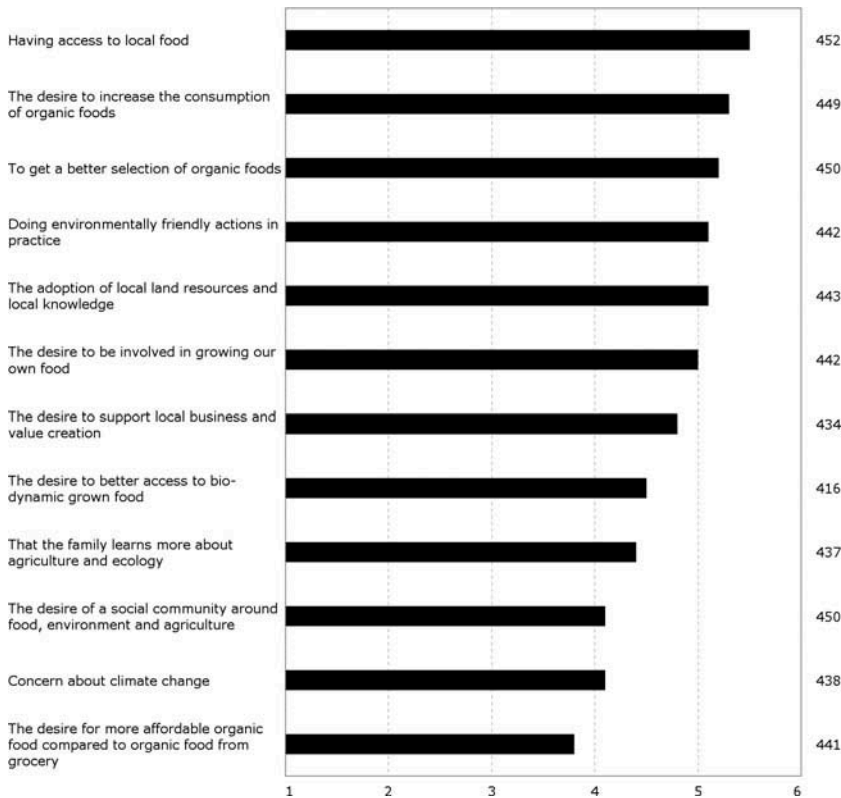


Figure 2. Motivations for being a member of a CSA farm. The statements are given scores on a scale from 1–6, (*not important*) to 6 (*very important*). Average score on the statements given by the sample.

as particularly important (4.1), and neither is concern about climate change (4.1). The respondents, on average, are neutral when it came to a desire for more affordable food as an important motivation for being a member (3.8).

For most motivations, members who are also actively participating at the farm, generally gave higher scores.

In the survey, many members elaborated on their views on why they decided to join, or even initiate, their CSA. Many wanted to expand their choice of organic products beyond what is available at grocery stores, with emphasis on local produce. Additionally, several members described the products to be tasteful, fresh, natural, and nutritious. Further, members were motivated by the opportunity to escape from plastic packaging, pesticides, or worries about genetically engineered food, and instead have food produced with respect for the environment, health, animals, and justice. However, a few members explained that they solely were interested in the fresh and various products without having concerns for any larger societal issues. Similarly, only a few members explicitly expressed that they do not trust the food from the regular food supply chains, yet, by their description of attributes of CSA food, indicate that

these properties are missing from the general mainstream supplies. The search for transparency in production, and sometimes also farm economy, were explained to be important drivers (emphasized during interviews of core members at the case study farms), and to reconnect to the places where the food is produced and to the person who actually produces the food they eat.

One member described motivations like this:

It is a desire for contact with those who grow the food we eat, to contribute to secure and predictable conditions, and recognition for their effort. Gratitude towards the food being produced in such a careful and environmentally friendly way and the possibility to show this and being part of a community that gives the farmer greater job satisfaction.

Additionally, some members express a desire to support agricultural land and farmers and to preserve fertile soils in their urban areas. In fact, one of the CSA farms has put into use agricultural land in the city, which was threatened by development, and a group of neighboring citizens established a cooperative CSA and hired a grower for the land. One member expressed:

It was very important for us that the farm we are members of is used for producing food, because the area is under strong pressure for construction of houses and other buildings, parking spaces and infrastructure. And this despite the fact that this is very good and fertile soil for food production.

Several members claimed that the schemes have given them more choices and they have gotten to know more varieties of vegetables, legumes, and other plants. At the same time, they have learned how to use more of the plants and reduce wastage. Generally, members express that they have learned more about farming and experience greater joy preparing food with fresh and even unexplored ingredients. Further, teaching their children and grandchildren how to produce food in a sustainable way is highlighted by some members to be an important consideration. This may relate to the fact that most members live in urban areas and most likely have had little to do with practical farming before. In addition, others seek a sense of community with like-minded consumers and farmers by sharing knowledge, experiences, and thoughts.

As a result of being part of a CSA two respondents expressed the following effects:

A very good scheme which has increased the consumption of vegetables and the variety in what we eat. The children are doing better eating vegetables, and they have great joy of participating in harvesting vegetables and fruit they are going to eat.

It feels good for both body and soul to work with soil and vegetation, as it gives relaxation and recreation, and an active life.

The study also discovered that many of the members were organic consumers before they took part in the CSA, but the schemes have given them better access and, hence, increased the consumption of organic food. This increase in demand also takes place in organic purchases from other sources.

One respondent was conscious about food production and other aspects of sustainable living, and noted:

I have a superior goal in my life about contributing to establishing sustainable local communities. A local and organic food production is one of several important measures to realize this goal.

This, and the other respondents' comments, indicate that joining the CSA can be viewed as a tool for transforming one's own values and attitudes into practical actions and measures. It is noteworthy that the common interest in food has even led to other forms of cooperation among members. At one farm members share transportation back and forth to the farm; at another farm, a group of members buy organic milk directly from a neighboring dairy farm that also delivers biofertilizer to the CSA farm; at a third farm, members organize joint procurement of local, organic meat and other food items, and have a physical store by the farm.

CSA as a transformational act

According to Méndez, Bacon, and Cohen (2013), a transformational agroecology consists of a critique of the current agro-food regime, and is "committed to a more just and sustainable future by reshaping power relations from farm to table" (12). In the following we argue why the CSA farmers and consumers can be seen as "spearheads," not only within organic farming and consumption, but also as transformational agents on a broader basis.

For the producers (farmers and growers) in our study, CSA represents a model that corresponds with their ideology about true organic farming, that is, representing diversity, a local food system with nutrient cycling, the reduction of wastage, and offerings of seasonal produce adjusting to agroecological practices (c.f. Levidow, Pimbert, and Vanloqueren 2014). CSA for them has been a prolonged conversion process going further than intensive conventional organic farming and with a redesigning of the farming system, as described by Lamine and Bellon (2009). As farm economy and organization are related directly toward the consumers, the model also represents an act of independency from the power relations of the current food regime. This independence is reinforced by the experience of more predictability and better economic outcomes by being a CSA farm, a benefit that also has been found throughout the literature (Henderson and Robyn 2007; Soil Association 2014; Tegtmeier and Duffy 2005; Lizio and Lass 2005; SERIO 2012; Lass et al. 2003).

This transformational orientation, with a close relationship and interaction with the ones they are producing for and with, is expected to provide a more social, joyful, and agronomic interesting workday. Our study shows this to be important for the quality of life of the producers, as it counteracts the feeling of alienation caused by the industrial production system with many intermediaries between themselves and the consumers. Renting, Marsden, and Banks (2003) argue that short food supply chains “hold the potential for shifting food production out of its industrial mode” (398), which our study confirms through the high diversity and participatory farm scheme. Additionally, the farmers and growers in our study, to various degrees, are active on social media and other networks in order to share experiences that will help newcomers and to strengthen the movement as a whole—an attitude also found in Lass et al. (2003).

For the consumers in our study, the most important motivation for being part of CSA is access to fresh, local, and organic food with greater selection. This must be seen in relation to the fact that Norway does not have chains of natural food stores that are widely available in many other countries. A study of CSAs in the United States shows the opposite—that consumers join CSA despite a limited choice of products in CSAs (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007). On the other hand, in confluence with findings in O’Hara and Stagl (2002), joining a CSA increases members’ consumption of organic food purchased from other sources.

Most members are attracted to CSA because the model offers a lot more than the food itself, like transparency and participatory aspects of production and economy. Generally, the CSA farms in Norway are based on participation from members in practical work such as seeding, weeding, and harvesting. The extent of participation seems to be more extensive than for example in the United States or United Kingdom (Henderson and Robyn 2007; Soil Association 2014), which probably has an influence on who is attracted to the farms. The Norwegian members state that, to a great degree, they find it meaningful to grow their own food and have a desire to be involved in growing their own food. Further, many members express the importance of reattachment to the place where the food is produced and to the person who produces the food they eat (c.f. Feagan 2007). Thompson and Gokcen (2007) found that members cultivate the feelings of enchantment by appreciation of the diversity in crops, varieties within the crops, different sizes and shapes, as well as doing practical manual work at the farm.

At the same time, members want to support local agriculture and protection of soil resources, as Thompson and Gokcen (2007) also found as important motivations. Protection of land resources and fertile soils are important drivers for Norwegian members. Others find it meaningful to connect with other people of similar interests and values in a sense of community, but this was not the most important motivation (see O’Hara and Stagl 2002).

Many consumers noted an expanded knowledge from their interaction with the farmer and the other CSA members, which inspired them in different ways. For example, not only could it lead to use of a broader variety of plants, but even further, could lead to new forms of cooperation among members when it came to other purchases of local, organic food as well as other solutions for product transport. These are examples on how being a member of a CSA farm can reinforce members' values and motivations and take their actions even further through new networks and opportunities. Related to this, it is interesting that the study revealed that motivations for joining the CSA were strongest for members who had participated in activities at the farm.

Further, our results reveal the tendency that, even before becoming a CSA member, members had internalized values and attitudes when it came to ethics around food consumption and production. Several members explained that this is why they got engaged in CSA—a finding that is in confluence with such research as O'Hara and Stagl (2002), who write that many scientists recognize “to the extent that behaviors are learned, they are transmitted by culture and society through families and social groups” (515). Also some of the members in our study stated that they intended to bring the experience further into the next generation through their children and youth. The ideology of CSA fits what we can consider core Norwegian values such as engagement and participation in one's own community, finding closeness to nature and landscape, being active, and spending time outdoors. Bringing these values forth to the next generation is an important part of raising children and is reflected in how families spend leisure time.

Carfagna et al. (2014) argues that “conscious consumers could be early adaptors of practices and behaviors that will diffuse widely. Indeed, many consumer practices and products that are now part of mass consumer culture started among elites” (161). The unconventional organizational model of CSA is itself an act toward food system changes and, thus, is not necessarily dependent on the individual members' motivations and goals of change. Initiators of the CSAs, that is, the farmers in producer-driven and (often) core members in consumer-driven farms, show clear goals of their engagement, and they expand their knowledge and views in interaction with each other. However, our study has shown that not all members necessarily have altruistic or political motivations, but simply want to get themselves fresh food of high quality and great variation. This, to some extent, supports Tregear's (2011) critical reflections about blurring between structural properties of the phenomena of alternative food networks and the goals of the participants within those phenomena.

Concluding thoughts

Farmers and consumers involved in CSA can be seen as part of a larger alternative food movement in opposition to industrialized agriculture and a globalized food system with its current power relations. Farmers and most consumers are attracted to the CSA model, seeking alternative ways to produce, consume, and communicate around food, where they are actively defining the agenda and with a focus on food security. They want to bring forth fresh, safe, and locally produced food that is produced with care for environment, health, justice, and animal welfare. CSAs are creating local food systems with reallocation of power and are (principally) operating independent of the current power regime. Additionally, as seen today in Norway, the production systems are based on agroecological practices and there is a consistency between supply and demand of products.

The National Movement of Organic Producers and Consumers in Norway—Oikos—is very busy monitoring the stream of CSA initiatives. Additionally, the CSA model is getting attention from the national (conventional) agricultural organizations. The support of these (in Norway) powerful organizations stimulates the fast emergence of CSA farms, but might also be a challenge when it comes to communicating and resisting dilution of the core values and agroecological practices within the current CSA movement. This is especially relevant since CSA farmers and growers often claim a lack of relevant agronomical competence being a barrier to the future development of CSAs.

Thus, the challenge is to transfer and scale-up the progressive engagement and sustainable practices found at the local scale so they can be put on the political agenda, as also concluded by Fernandez et al. (2012). Being part of an alternative food network, and especially the case of the CSA movement, is probably not for the masses of farmers and consumers, but attracts a segment of dedicated organic consumers. Still, the CSA examples as we see them in Norway are capable of showing a direction in agronomic practice and a unique interaction between producers and consumers in the struggle towards sustainable production and consumption. In order to have an influence on the broader society by diffusing practices and experiences outward, it is important that the CSAs are open oriented and communicate their practices and experiences. In this relation, it is interesting that CSA farms and the Norwegian government have somehow coinciding visions and thoughts about future agriculture and food consumption, such as increased food security based on domestic produce, preservation of soil resources, support of local businesses, increased interaction between producer and consumer, and, in general, a more sustainable production. However, to see these visions materialize in a shift in how food is produced and how the food system is organized will be another more difficult question to be explored.

Acknowledgments

This study's main objective was to investigate the role of CSA in order to enhance knowledge and increase the organic production and consumption in Norway. Geir Lieblein, at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences has given useful advices at the initial phase on this article. Also associates at Telemark Research Institute have been valuable discussion partners.

Funding

The study, on which the empirical data of this article is based, is funded by the Norwegian Agricultural Agency.

ORCID

Christine Hvitsand  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4804-6716>

References

- Almås, R., E. Bratberg, and G. Syverud. 2014. *Jordbruk i Norge*. [Agriculture in Norway] https://snl.no/Jordbruk_i_Norge. (accessed November 25, 2014).
- Borgen, S. O., P. O. Røkholt, and A. Sørensen. 2006. *Norsk landbrukssamvirke—fra forvaltning til marked (Norwegian co-operatives—From management to market)*. Oslo: Norwegian Agricultural Economics Research Institute.
- Brehm, J. M., and B. W. Eisenhauer. 2008. Motivations for participating in community-supported agriculture and their relationship with community attachment and social capital. *Southern Rural Sociology* 23(1):94–115.
- Brown, C., and S. Miller. 2008. The impacts of local markets: A review of research on farmers markets and community supported agriculture (CSA). *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 90(5):1296–302. doi:10.1111/ajae.2008.90.issue-5.
- Carfagna, L. B., E. A. Dubois, C. Fitzmaurice, M. Y. Ouimette, J. B. Schor, M. Willis, and T. Laidley. 2014. An emerging eco-habitus: The reconfiguration of high cultural capital practices among ethical consumers. *Journal of Consumer Culture* doi:10.1177/1469540514526227.
- Cox, R., L. Holloway, L. Venn, L. Dowler, J. R. Hein, M. Kneafsey, and H. Tuomainen. 2008. Common ground? Motivations for participation in a community-supported agriculture scheme. *Local Environment* 13(3):203–18. doi:10.1080/13549830701669153.
- Feagan, R. 2007. The place of food: Mapping out the 'local' in local food systems. *Progress in Human Geography* 31(1):23–42. doi:10.1177/0309132507073527.
- Fernandez, M., K. Goodall, M. Olson, and V. Ernesto Méndez. 2012. Agroecology and alternative agri-food movements in the United States: Toward a sustainable agri-food system. *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems* 37(1):115–26. doi:10.1080/10440046.2012.735633.
- Galt, R. E. 2013. The moral economy is a double-edged sword: Explaining farmers' earnings and self-exploitation in community-supported agriculture. *Economic Geography* 89(4):341–65. doi:10.1111/ecge.12015.
- Gliessman, S. 2014. Agroecology and social transformation. *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems* 38(10):1125–26. doi:10.1080/21683565.2014.951904.

- Henderson, E., and V. E. Robyn. 2007. *Sharing the harvest: A citizen's guide to community supported agriculture*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green.
- Hvitsand, C. 2014. *Organic spearhead—The role of community supported agriculture in enhancing bio economy, and increased knowledge about and consumption of organic food*. Bø i Telemark, Norway: Telemark Research Institute. [title translated from Norwegian].
- Knutsen, H., ed. 2013. *A view over Norwegian agriculture. state and development trends*. Oslo, Norway: Norwegian Agricultural Economics Research Institute.
- Kolodinsky, J. M., and L. L. Pelch. 1997. Factors influencing the decision to join a community supported agriculture (CSA) farm. *Journal of Sustainable Agriculture* 10(2–3):129–41. doi:10.1300/J064v10n02_11.
- Lamine, C., and S. Bellon. 2009. Conversion to organic farming: A multidimensional research object at the crossroads of agricultural and social sciences. A review. *Agronomy for Sustainable Development* 29(1):97–112. doi:10.1051/agro:2008007.
- Lass, D., A. Bevis, G. W. Stevenson, J. Hendrickson, and K. Ruhf. 2003. *Community Supported Agriculture entering the 21st century: Results from the 2001 national survey*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts, Department of Resource Economics.
- Levidow, L., M. Pimbert, and G. Vanloqueren. 2014. Agroecological research: Conforming—or transforming the dominant agro-food regime? *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems* 38(10):1127–55. doi:10.1080/21683565.2014.951459.
- Lizio, W., and D. A. Lass. 2005. *CSA 2001: An evolving platform for ecological and economical agricultural marketing and production*. Amherst, MA: Department of Resource Economics, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.
- Lyson, T. A., and J. Green. 1999. The agricultural marketscape: A framework for sustaining agriculture and communities in the northeast. *Journal of Sustainable Agriculture* 15(2–3):133–50. doi:10.1300/J064v15n02_12.
- Méndez, V. E., C. M. Bacon, and R. Cohen. 2013. Agroecology as a transdisciplinary, participatory, and action-oriented approach. *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems* 37(1):3–18.
- Norwegian Agricultural Agency. 2014. *Production and turnover of organic agricultural products*. Oslo, Norway: Norwegian Agricultural Agency.
- O'Hara, S. U., and S. Stagl. 2002. Endogenous preferences and sustainable development. *The Journal of Socio-Economics* 31(5):511–27. doi:10.1016/S1053-5357(02)00134-8.
- Renting, H., T. K. Marsden, and J. Banks. 2003. Understanding alternative food networks: Exploring the role of short food supply chains in rural development. *Environment and Planning A* 35(3):393–411. doi:10.1068/a3510.
- SERIO. 2012. *The value of the community food sektor. An economic baseline of community food enterprises*. Plymouth, UK: SERIO [with Plymouth University].
- Skjelvik, J. M., S. Pedersen, M. Tofteng, R. Røtnes, and M. D. Nielsen. 2012. *Evaluering av tilskudd som skal bidra til økt produksjon og forbruk av økologisk mat* [Evaluation of subsidies and grants to enhance organic farming and consumption]. Oslo, Norway: Vista Analyse and Damvad.
- Soil Association. 2014. *A share in the harvest. An action manual for community supported agriculture*, 2nd ed. www.soilassociation.org.
- Sørensen, A.-C., and B. Tennbakk. 2002. *Regulatory institutions in agricultural markets: A comparative analysis*. Paper prepared for presentation at the 10th EAAE Congress, Exploring Diversity in the European Agri Food System, Zaragoza, Spain, August 28–31.
- Storstad, O., and B. Hilde. 2003. Foundations of production and consumption of organic food in Norway: Common attitudes among farmers and consumers? *Agriculture and Human Values* 20(2):151–63. doi:10.1023/A:1024069627349.

- Tegtmeier, E., and M. Duffy. 2005. *Community supported agriculture (CSA) in the Midwest United States. A regional characterization*. <https://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs-and-papers/2005-01-community-supported-agriculture>.
- Terragni, L., H. Torjusen, and G. Vittersø. 2009. The dynamics of alternative food consumption: Contexts, opportunities and transformations. *Anthropology of Food*. <https://aof.revues.org/6400>.
- Thompson, C. J., and C.-B. Gokcen. 2007. Enchanting ethical consumerism the case of community supported agriculture. *Journal of Consumer Culture* 7 (3):275–303. doi:10.1177/1469540507081631.
- Torjusen, H. 2004. *Tillit til mat i det norske markedet. Hvordan oppfatter forbrukere trygg mat?* [Trust in the Norwegian food market: How do consumers perceive safe food?] Oslo, Norway: National Institute for Consumer Research (SIFO).
- Torjusen, H., G. Lieblein, and G. Vittersø. 2008. Learning, communicating and eating in local food-systems: The case of organic box schemes in Denmark and Norway. *Local Environment* 13(3):219–34. doi:10.1080/13549830701669252.
- Tregear, A. 2011. Progressing knowledge in alternative and local food networks: Critical reflections and a research agenda. *Journal of Rural Studies* 27(4):419–30. doi:10.1016/j.jrurstud.2011.06.003.
- Vegetarian Association. 2015. *En innføring i vegetarkost: introduksjon*. http://veg-veg.no/vegetar/hva_er_vegetarisme (accessed January 15, 2015).
- Veidal, A. 2011. *Farm based entrepreneurship. A qualitative study of opportunities, motivations and resources for entrepreneurship in agriculture*. Oslo, Norway: Norwegian Agricultural Economics Research Institute.
- Wezel, A., S. Bellon, T. Dore, C. Francis, D. Vallod, and C. David. 2009. Agroecology as a science, a movement or a practice. *Agronomy for Sustainable Development* doi:10.1051/agro/2009004.
- Zasada, I. 2011. Multifunctional peri-urban agriculture—A review of societal demands and the provision of goods and services by farming. *Land Use Policy* 28(4):639–48. doi:10.1016/j.landusepol.2011.01.008.