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Brief #9

## Meeting Farm and Food Security Needs through Community Supported Agriculture and Farmers' Markets in California

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In the face of an increasingly consolidated, industrialized, and often faceless food system, many researchers and activists have looked to alternative food institutions (AFIs) as ways to improve the food system for both producers and consumers. AFIs include urban gardens, food policy councils, alternative education programs, farmers' markets, and community supported agriculture (Allen et al. 2003). These last two are of particular interest because many perceive them to be win-win for both producers *and* consumers. That is, even though farmers' markets and CSAs were originally developed to provide markets for the increasingly beleaguered small-scale and family farmers, recently the goals of food security have been attached to these AFIs.

At least since the 1995 Farm Bill discussions, the community food security and sustainable agriculture movements have made a strategic alliance, combining the goals of farm security and food security in their platforms and projects (Allen 2004). Among their strategies for achieving these goals is the continued development of alternative agri-food institutions, including farmers' markets and community supported agriculture (CSA) arrangements. The hope is that eliminating market intermediaries will improve the food system for both disadvantaged small-scale farmers and low-income consumers.

Is it possible to simultaneously make fresh, nutritious food affordable to low-income people while providing a decent return to small-scale farmers through farmers' markets and CSAs? Certainly, direct marketing opportunities like farmers' markets and CSAs can be economic lifelines for small-scale growers, particularly those using sustainable farming practices. Not only do direct markets enable growers to avoid transactions with middlemen and sell products at retail prices (Griffin and Frongillo 2003), they also often provide the only space through which small-scale farmers with limited production can enter the market. Several studies have documented the benefits of direct markets to small-scale farmers (Andreatta and Wickliffe 2002; Feenstra et al. 2003; Govindasamy et al. 2003).

Less is known, however, about how well they serve low-income consumers. The goal of our research, therefore, was to see how and

to what extent California CSAs and farmers' markets are addressing food security in both concept and practice. We focused our research on these two types of AFIs because they best exemplify the idea of an economic "win-win" situation for farmers and consumers. Also, unlike farm-to-school programs and community gardens, which tend to operate as public-private partnerships, farmers' markets and CSAs operate more fully under the constraints and opportunities of the market.

### RESEARCH METHODS

The majority of our data were gathered through a survey conducted of farmers' market and CSA managers in California during 2004–2005. We wanted to get the views of market and CSA managers because they best know the constraints under which their operations must function. In addition, their intentions, decisions, and efforts play a key role in the ways and degree to which food security is addressed in these institutions.

Questionnaires were sent to all CSA and farmers' market managers for whom we could find mailing addresses. CSA contact information came from a variety of online sources. Farmers' market manager contact information came from USDA, California Certified Farmers Markets, and Local Harvest websites. Managers who were in charge of multiple markets received multiple questionnaires.<sup>1</sup> Thirty-seven CSA questionnaires were returned of 111 sent, for a response rate of 33 percent. For farmers' markets, 157 questionnaires were returned by 101 managers, for a response rate of 35 percent of 443 questionnaires sent to 294 managers.

Respondents are fairly representative of the scope of farmers' market and CSA operations in California (table 1). Most surveyed CSAs (25) were run by single families or individuals. Others were run by non-profits (5), government institutions (4), a non-family partnership (1), and a cooperative (1).<sup>3</sup>

There was similar variation among farmers' markets (table 1). Of the managers who answered our question about the type of organization that runs their market, a large majority indicated that they were run by non-profits (71); others were run by government institutions (14), chambers of commerce (13),

**Table 1. Characteristics of CSAs and farmers’ markets surveyed**

CSA Characteristics	Range	Median or Mean
# of shares <sup>2</sup> sold	2–3,546	50 (median)
Price per week	\$7.50–\$30	\$18.50 (mean)
Farm size (acres)	2–600	12 (median)
Time in operation	a few months–17 years	6.9 years (mean)
Gross annual income	\$350–\$350,000	\$40,000 (median)
Farmers' Market Characteristics	Range	Median or Mean
# farmers participating	1–100	20 (median)
# customers	18–9,000	600 (median)
Amount spent per day	\$38–\$75,000	\$5,000 (median)
Time in operation	a few months–33 years	10.9 years (mean)

private businesses (13), or private individuals, groups of growers, and other miscellaneous institutions (29).

In addition, the geographic scope was quite wide. Farmers’ market respondents came from 41 of California’s 58 counties, including counties in all major regions of the state, and CSA respondents came from the major, highly regionalized pockets of CSA activity.

We also conducted interviews with a purposive sample (selected to capture a broad range of organizational characteristics) of CSA and farmers’ market managers during May through August 2004. To gain more background on the use of entitlement programs by AFIs, we also interviewed key individuals with the USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service and one non-profit group involved with managing and promoting entitlement programs for farmers’ markets.

While our sample is limited to California, and may therefore reflect particular regional sensibilities, it nevertheless captures a broad range of the possible configurations and characteristics of CSAs and farmers’ markets in the United States as a whole. Despite regional differences in growing seasons, crops produced, and ethnic diversity, our sense is that CSAs and farmers’ markets tend to develop and thrive in particular socioeconomic environments that are likely to be very similar from place to place. We can at least say that our data are representative of the diversity of CSAs and farmers’ markets in California.

**IMPORTANCE OF FOOD SECURITY ISSUES**

We asked CSA and farmers’ market managers to rank on a six-point scale how important they thought it was for their AFI type to address issues of food access and affordability for low-income people. The vast majority of CSA and farmers’ market managers believe that these institutions should be paying attention to issues of food security. Eighty-one percent of farmers’ market managers and 77 percent of CSA managers considered it important to extremely important (table 2). We further asked if they would be willing to employ strategies that other farmers’ markets or CSAs had used to serve low-income people. We found significant support for the idea of trying out new

strategies to reach low-income people (table 3). Ninety-one percent of CSA managers and 83 percent of farmers’ market managers said they would or might consider employing additional tactics to serve low-income people. These data suggest a strong commitment among managers to improving food security through farmers markets and CSAs as a broad concept.

**EFFORTS TO SERVE LOW-INCOME CONSUMERS**

We wanted to learn what strategies are used to serve low-income people, especially in light of strong support for the goal of inclusion. On the questionnaires we listed several possible strategies for reaching low-income consumers and provided space for respondents to write in strategies of their own. These data demonstrate that a tremendous amount of effort has been devoted to working to address both access and affordability. Among CSAs, 83 percent of respondents had attempted at least one strategy to attract low-income people (table 4); among farmers’ markets, the figure was 87 percent (table 5). In coding responses, we organized these strategies into four categories: direct outreach, discount, food recovery, and entitlement. The strategies and categories for both CSAs and farmers’ markets are found in tables 4 and 5.

**Table 2. Manager perceptions of importance of addressing issues of food security through farmers’ markets (n=97) and CSAs (n=35)**

	Percentage of managers rating access and affordability as important	
	Market managers	CSA managers
1–3 (not important)	18.6	22.9
4–6 (important)	81.4	77.1
Mean rating	4.59+1.463	4.46+1.442

<sup>a</sup>Note: 1=not at all important; 6=extremely important

**Table 3. Manager willingness to consider using new strategies to serve low-income people in farmers’ markets (n=86) and CSAs (n=31)**

Willing to consider using new strategies	Percentage of market managers	Percentages of CSA managers
Yes	72.1	64.5
Maybe	10.5	25.8
No	17.4	9.7

There were substantial differences between farmers' markets and CSAs in strategies used to improve low-income access. Farmers' markets relied most on the use of entitlements and CSAs relied most on food recovery. As shown in table 5, 82 percent of farmers' markets have used at least one entitlement tactic, dwarfing the other strategies by a considerable margin. Use of Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) coupons accounted for the largest percentage of entitlement strategies by far; 78 percent of markets indicated that they accept FMNP coupons.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, none of the CSAs we surveyed use entitlements. CSAs most frequently looked to food recovery as a means to serve low-income consumers, with 61 percent of CSAs having attempted at least one food recovery tactic, usually food donations.

A number of examples of internal redistribution exist in CSAs and farmers' markets. Indeed, the idea of having a community or organization cross subsidize (i.e., an internal redistribution), was, actually, the original vision of CSA. As one CSA manager put it, "the CSA community commits to financially supporting the farm . . . and everyone gets together in a room, the farm budget is shared, and people go around and pledge what they can afford," but as she noted, it was unlikely to work as a business model in the United States. As an implicit operationalization of this sort of subsidy, half of those CSA managers surveyed have offered discounts of some kind, as illustrated in table 4, although to our knowledge, none have implemented the strong form of redistribution mentioned above. While the analog of this sort of redistribution was not mentioned by our farmers' market respondents, there are examples of between-market redistribution. For example, the Victory Park market in Pasadena, California was set up specifically to help subsidize growers selling at the lower-income market in nearby Villa Park; growers cannot sell produce at Victory Park without selling at Villa Park as well. The San Francisco Heart of the City's Wednesday farmers' market, which draws hundreds of office workers, subsidizes its Sunday market, which draws many more low-income Asians, Latinos, and African Americans

**Table 4. Percentage of CSAs using strategies to improve food access and affordability (n=37)**

Category	Strategy	Percent
<b>Direct outreach</b>	<b>Any direct outreach strategy</b>	<b>16.7</b>
	Did outreach in low-income communities	8.3
	Provided delivery sites in low-income communities	16.7
<b>Discount</b>	<b>Any discount strategy</b>	<b>50.0</b>
	Offered lower-price shares	25.0
	Offered sliding-scale shares based on income	8.3
	Deferred payment	22.2
	Raised funds from organizations to subsidize share costs	5.6
	Solicited donations from individuals to subsidize share costs	25.0
<b>Food recovery</b>	<b>Any food recovery strategy</b>	<b>61.1</b>
	Allowed gleaning at the CSA farming site	22.2
	Donated food from the CSA	66.1
<b>Entitlement</b>		<b>0</b>
<b>Any strategy</b>		<b>83.3</b>

**Table 5. Percentage of farmers' markets using strategies to improve food access and affordability (n=157)**

Category	Strategy	Percent
<b>Direct outreach</b>	<b>Any direct outreach strategy</b>	<b>28.0</b>
	Market is located in low-income neighborhood	14.5
	Did outreach in low-income communities	20.1
<b>Discount</b>	<b>Any discount strategy</b>	<b>21.7</b>
	Encouraged growers to offer discounts	16.4
	Subsidized growers to offer discounts	8.2
<b>Food recovery</b>	<b>Any food recovery strategy</b>	<b>52.2</b>
	Encouraged growers to donate food from the market	44.7
	Solicited donations for emergency food programs	22.0
	Allowed gleaning at the market	17.6
<b>Entitlement</b>	<b>Any entitlement strategy</b>	<b>82.2</b>
	Accepted WIC/FMNP	78.0
	Accepted food stamps	44.7
	Accepted EBT	22.6
<b>Any strategy</b>		<b>87.3</b>

from the Tenderloin neighborhood (Fisher 1999).

We also note some success with the indirect subsidies of the nonprofit sector. For example, Tierra Miguel CSA, a non-profit, uses grant funds to supply shares to low-income diabetics through the Indian Health Council and funding from the Los Angeles Unified School District's Nutrition Network to deliver boxes of produce to nearly 1,000 Los Angeles classrooms. Full Belly Farm CSA, a for-profit partnership, provides donations of produce to a Sacramento area shelter and food kitchen, which are subsidized by a local church congregation.

#### **PARTICIPATION OF LOW-INCOME CONSUMERS IN FARMERS' MARKETS AND CSAs**

Despite these efforts, managers reported low rates of participation by low-income people, both in farmers' markets and CSAs (table 6).<sup>\*</sup> Other data support these perceptions. For example, it appears that few of those who are eligible for federal food assistance programs participate in these

<sup>\*</sup>Since it was impractical to collect data from individual participants due to the size of our sample, we instead asked farmers' market and CSA managers to estimate the percent of their customers they thought were high income, middle income, or low income (totaling 100 percent).

market-oriented AFIs. In 1998, less than 25 percent of food stamp recipients reported shopping at a farmers' market, and food stamp redemptions at farmers' markets accounted for only 0.02 percent of overall redemptions (Kantor 2001; Ohls et al. 1999). In the case of CSA, a number of studies have found that CSAs primarily serve members with high incomes (Cohen et al. 1997; Cone and Myhre 2000; Festing 1997; Hinrichs and Kremer 2002; Lawson 1997; Perez et al. 2003).

There remains low participation on the part of low-income people in farmers' markets and CSAs despite the intentions and efforts of their managers. Yet AFI managers generally support the idea of improving the affordability of the food they provide, and most have made an effort to put their convictions into practice. How do managers explain the low rates of participation?

Given that existing research already shows that CSAs tend to serve a disproportionately affluent clientele, we asked CSA managers, "What do you think are some of the reasons that it is primarily affluent people who seem to participate in CSAs?" We coded the responses to this open-ended question into six categories (table 7). More than half of CSA managers surveyed said that it is because affluent people are more able to afford produce. This result can be taken as an explicit recognition that the fundamental issue has to do with cost relative to income.

Farmers' market managers had somewhat different responses to the question about the reasons for the participation of low-income people, in part because we posed the question differently. Since it is not necessarily the case that primarily affluent people seem to participate in farmers' markets, we asked, "If people of a particular income category make up the largest percentage of your market customers, why do you think that is the case?" By far the largest percentage of managers (52%) highlighted the demographics of the surrounding community as the key factor in shaping market participation (table 8). Given that most neighborhoods in the United States are segregated by income

**Table 6. Manager perceptions of customer income categories in CSAs (n=30) and farmers' markets (n=133)**

Income category	Mean percentage of customers identified as belonging to income category	
	Farmers' markets	CSAs
High income <sup>a</sup>	23.92	33.17
Middle income	53.03	57.00
Low income**	24.22	9.83

<sup>a</sup>p<0.10; \*\*p<0.01 (significant differences based on 2-tailed t-test)

(Denton and Massey 1998), this is essentially saying that ability to afford farmers' market produce is a determining factor in participation.

Not all respondents saw lack of low-income participation as a cost issue. Indeed, some denied that cost was a factor. One form this took was the perspective that "if people only knew" more about food, they would certainly seek organic, healthy, and local food regardless of cost. For example, one CSA manager wrote that increased diversity in these institutions "can only happen when people understand the true costs, not the costs they pay for the food they eat." Likewise, in a study of California AFI leaders several made the claim that if people knew more about food, they would be willing to pay its "true price," thus enabling small-scale farmers to be more economically viable (Allen et al. 2003). These ideas also surfaced in our study when several CSA managers seemed to reject the idea that income could be a limiting factor in CSA participation. One CSA manager wrote, "Targeting those in our communities that are ethnic or low income would show

a prejudice we don't work within. We do outreach programs to reach everyone interested in eating locally, healthily, and organically," implying that CSA participation is a choice for those with certain values, regardless of income. Another CSA manager wrote, "I believe that the food is affordable to all; it's just a matter of different values and priorities."

**CAPACITY TO SERVE LOW-INCOME CONSUMERS**

Regardless of intentions, however, it turns out that the primary factors in the ability to address the needs of low-income consumers are less related to will than to structural factors. These include the scale of the enterprise, whether the enterprise is not-for-profit, and the extent to which it can work with public food assistance programs.

*Scale*

For farmers' markets there were significant correlations between the number of years markets had been operating, money spent daily at market, the number of farmers, and

**Table 7. Reasons given by CSA managers for participation of primarily affluent people in CSAs (n=36)**

Reason	Percent of managers that indicated reason
Affluent are more able to afford produce	55.56
Affluent are better educated	36.11
Affluent are more concerned about food quality	16.67
Affluent have more time	13.89
Affluent are more health conscious	11.11
Local demographics	1.39

Note: Percentages do not equal 100 because some managers indicated multiple reasons in response to an open-ended question.

**Table 8. Reasons given by farmers' market managers for people of a particular income category making up the majority of market customers (n=157)**

Reason	Percent of managers that indicated reason
Local demographics	51.57
Affluent are more concerned about food quality	4.40
Affluent are more able to afford produce/prices at market	2.52
Affluent are more health conscious	1.89

Note: Percentages do not equal 100 because the question was open ended and not all managers answered it.

**Table 9. Farmers' market institutional capacity: significant correlations between number of strategies used and scale-related variables (n=155)**

Scale-related variable	Number of strategies used	Food recovery strategies used	Entitlement strategies used
Years operating	R=0.236**	R=0.280**	R=0.267
Money spent daily	R=0.171 <sup>a</sup>	R=0.264**	
Number of farmers	R=0.364***	R=0.448***	R=0.384***

<sup>a</sup>p<0.10; \*p<0.5; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001

the number of strategies employed to increase access for low-income people (table 9). This is likely because larger, more established markets with more revenue have the cushion to experiment with such ventures. We also found significant positive correlations between operational scale and strategies employed for CSAs. There were positive correlations between the number of discount strategies used and the number of years CSAs had been operating, as well as between the number of food recovery strategies used and gross CSA income. In addition, CSA managers who indicated that they believe improving access is important reported an average gross income of \$113,706, while those who do not consider it important reported an average gross income of \$24,321, suggesting that larger operations may place higher priority than smaller ones

on serving low-income customers, if only because it is more possible for them to do so.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Institution type*

We also found significant differences in the use of strategies to address low-income access and affordability among the different types of institutions that run farmers' markets.\* Non-profit farmers' markets and those run by government institutions used more strategies to reach low-income consumers than did chambers of commerce or private businesses (table 10).<sup>6</sup> Since non-profit organizations have access to tax-exempt donations from private donors, foundation grants, and public funding, they can subsidize some of their costs. In addition, as organizations with charitable and educational purposes, non-profits are guided by missions that must have broad public benefit. For example,

Harbor Area Farmers' Markets, an association of five markets sponsored largely by the South Coast Interfaith Council, states that they exist to "encourage cross-section interaction of the population, support low-income and oppressed populations, and offer a venue particularly focused on maintaining small family farms" (Harbor Area Farmers Markets n.d.). The fact that markets run by non-profits (which are effectively subsidized by both private donors and public agencies) employ more food security practices than other types of organizations (and that government-run markets used nearly as many) is significant.

#### *Public assistance programs*

As we have seen thus far, farmers' markets seem to have better rates of participation among low-income people than do CSAs, and some of this can be attributed to the use of federal entitlements in such markets. Indeed, we saw a significant correlation between the use of at least one of several entitlement strategies and the percentage of low-income customers in farmers' markets. Two federal food programs designed to assist low-income consumers can be used at farmers' markets: food stamps and the farmers' market nutrition program (FMNP). The federal food stamp program is the most substantial food-related entitlement program in the U.S., and food stamps can be used at farmers' markets. The FMNP program, initiated in 1992, was designed explicitly as a dual purpose program intended both to provide fresh produce to WIC participants (and, later,

<sup>5</sup>The number of CSAs surveyed was not large enough to obtain any statistically significant results based on organizational type in regard to the use of strategies to address low-income access and affordability.

**Table 10. Farmers' market organization type and mean number of strategies used (n=140)**

	Mean number of strategies used by organizational type				
	Chamber of commerce	Government institution	Private business	Non-profit	Other
Strategy type	n=13	n=14	n=13	n=71	n=29
Total strategies**	1.31	3.29	2.77	3.69	2.34
Food recovery strategies**	0.00	0.79	0.62	1.17	0.48
Entitlement strategies**	0.85	1.71	1.15	1.73	1.10

\*\*p<0.01 (significant differences based on one-way ANOVAs)

seniors) and to “expand awareness and use of farmers’ markets” and “increase sales at such markets” (California Department of Health Services n.d.). WIC participants and seniors whose household income is up to 185 percent of poverty level are eligible for FMNP vouchers. In 2004, over 2.5 million WIC recipients received such benefits nationally (FNS/USDA 2006). Because they are provided in paper form, they are relatively easy for farmers and farmers’ market managers to process. Unlike food stamps, moreover, these FMNP coupons can *only* be used at farmers’ markets.

The FMNP, which is relatively simple and profitable for farmers’ markets to use, is not available to CSAs at all. In addition, the USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) does not allow some CSAs to process food stamps. CSAs that require an entire season’s payment in advance and do not guarantee a certain amount of produce in return are considered too speculative for food stamp purchases. Many other CSAs (those that accept weekly or monthly payments) may be eligible to accept food stamps, but may not be aware that they can be authorized to accept food stamp benefits. Nor is it clear that consumers have tried to use food stamps at CSAs in California. One manager of a very well known CSA told us that the only people who have asked if they take food stamps are other researchers like ourselves. At the very least, this does suggest that means to address food security through these institutions have not fully been explored.

The situation, then, is that low-income people need access to fresh, healthy food, and farmers’ market and CSA managers would like to provide them with access to this food. What stands in the way of this convergence are the limitations of public programs designed to meet this need. For example, food stamp redemptions at farmers’ markets have declined during the last 10 years, having dropped precipitously from \$6.4 million to \$3.8 between 1994 and 1998 (Kantor 2001). This decline owes much to the transition from the use of paper food stamps to electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards.

Paper food stamps were replaced with ATM-like EBT cards between 1996 and 2002 in order to reduce both fraud and the administrative costs of processing paper coupons. This transition has made it much more difficult for many farmers’ markets to accept food stamps, since EBT systems require both phone lines and electricity, neither of which is available at many outdoor farmers’ market sites. One of the farmers’ market managers in our study noted that “the new EBT program didn’t consider farmers’ markets when it was put together. Additional costs are involved and markets are dropping the program.”

According to Penny Leff, the coordinator for the California Farmers’ Market EBT Implementation and Promotion Project, nearly 50 percent of California farmers’ markets—at least 150 markets—previously accepted paper food stamps, but now only about 65 markets in the state accept EBT. To remedy this situation, some farmers’ markets are setting up central point-of-sale (POS) devices and issuing farmers’ market scrip or tokens. These systems allow EBT participants to use their benefits to buy farmers’ market currency at a central location, which they can then use to buy approved foods from farmers. However, this is not typical. According to Leff, “usually only farmers’ markets that have a lot of low income customers or social consciousness where it’s part of their mission” will make the effort to accept EBT. Institutional scale matters too. Those markets with more vendors, for example, may have an easier time collecting sufficient fees to pay for POS machines.

According to Patty Blomberg, coordinator for FMNP in California, approximately 52 percent of FMNP coupons issued in California were redeemed in 2004. Yet, they are limited in both season and amount. Their dollar value is only \$10 to \$20 per year, and they are issued by local WIC offices only from May to November. While FMNP vouchers may serve to introduce low-income families and seniors to farmers’ markets, they do not constitute a substantial or consistent source of subsidy. And, if markets do not or cannot accept EBT benefits,

introducing low-income customers to farmers’ markets through the FMNP is unlikely to result in sustained participation.

### WHO SHOULD PAY?

The use of discount and entitlement strategies by AFI managers points to recognition that serving low-income consumers through farmers’ markets and CSAs requires redistribution. This leads us, then, to the question of who should pay the difference between the cost of produce and a person’s ability to pay.

We posed this as an open-ended question to farmers’ market and CSA managers and coded the responses. Similar percentages of farmers’ market and CSA managers pointed to the government and entitlement programs as appropriate sources of subsidy (table 11). CSA managers were much more likely to mention an internal source in addition—their members. Twenty-two percent of CSA managers mentioned that higher-income customers should subsidize share costs for lower-income participants, while only one farmers’ market manager mentioned that higher-income market customers should subsidize lower-income market customers. A small percentage of managers from both categories did not support the idea of redistribution.

It seems self-evident that the greatest barrier to the participation of low-income people in farmers’ markets and CSAs is that they have low incomes. This obvious, yet somehow politically obscured, point was reinforced by farmers’ market and CSA managers.

Thus, closing the gap between cost and price was the solution favored by survey respondents. At the same time, respondents were clear that providing access to low-income consumers should not and cannot be at the expense of small-scale growers.

While many CSA and farmers’ market managers expressed conceptual support for the role of AFIs in increasing food security, they expressed at least equivalent concern with farmer income. As one CSA manager said, “although I want low income families to participate, our costs and labor are also high, keeping us on the balancing edge

of low-income ourselves!” Another CSA manager emphasized that “we are by far the lowest income people in our CSA.”

Farmers also reported that farming itself is a big enough job, without farmers also trying to provide special programs. As stated by one CSA manager, “Until we can run our farm and pay bills it is very challenging to put the extra effort required for these programs, although we wish we could.” According to another manager, “A program like the WIC FMNP would be great. Small family farmers need to get a good price for their produce. We are not in the position to pick up the difference. If we can make enough money, we also need and want to pay our field workers a good wage.” Since the role of the CSA manager is to ensure the viability of the CSA business, it makes sense that they are reluctant to try new programs that could put the CSA at economic risk.

Even farmers’ market managers, who have to balance the needs of both producers and consumers, tended to prioritize the needs of farmers. According to one market manager, “While the issues of social justice, diversity, and multiculturalism are very dear to my heart, our main concern to date is the economic sustainability of the farmers.” Another manager said that farmers should not have to make their produce more affordable since they “are often without farm or medical insurance and deserve a decent price for the work they put into it.” Still another cautioned, “Let’s not forget that farmers themselves are an extremely at-risk minority of the population. Farmers’ markets give them a chance to remain on their farms.”

The bottom line is that it is neither reasonable nor possible for individual entrepreneurs to alone shoulder the load of providing fresh, healthy food for low-income people. One farmers’ market manager pointed out that, “We do not lobby Safeway [a large supermarket] to lower their costs so that poor people can buy more of their produce.”

Many respondents expressed frustration that they could not afford to do more to encourage low-income participation. However, the fact that others expressed what could be construed

**Table 11. Manager perspectives on who should subsidize the cost of produce for low-income customers in farmers’ markets (n=101) and CSAs (n=37)**

AFI type	Percentage of managers who indicated source of subsidy		
	Government (general)	WIC (FMNP)/ Food Stamps	CSA members/farmer’ market customers
Farmers’ market	37.6	15.8	1.0
CSAs	33.3	13.9	22.2

Note: Percentages do not equal 100 because the question was open-ended and not all managers answered it.

as hostile sentiments symptomizes an environment that may be inhospitable to low-income people. In some cases, support for farmers was accompanied by explicit resistance to redistribution programs to assist the poor. One manager said in response to who should pay to help low-income people participate in farmers’ markets, “NO ONE. Most low-income people receive help in obtaining food at the stores with food stamps (cards). I think it would be detrimental to farmers’ markets.” A response from a CSA manager suggested that poor people were themselves a problem: “I’m not sure that I agree that subsidy is the best route. In my experience, the subsidy customers are the least committed/reliable.”

The presence of such perspectives even among a minority of respondents casts doubt on the ability to meet these twin goals—farm security and food security—when doing so is left to individual initiative, as is necessarily the case with market-based approaches.

Our data suggest that the biggest success in bringing in low-income people has been through the use of public entitlements. That farmers’ markets have been relatively more successful in bringing in low-income people owes a lot to the widespread use of entitlement programs such as FMNP in these markets.

Most within the Community Food Security (CFS) movement, including many of the managers surveyed in this study, continue to advocate for entitlement food programs such as food stamps. At the same time, CFS organizers have looked to market-based approaches to food security problems both as insurance against the vagaries of changes in food assistance programs and as a mechanism to make people less dependent on charity (Allen 1999). It is ironic, then, that the way that

private CSAs and farmers’ markets achieve some elements of food security is by virtue of the support of public food assistance programs. That this is so demonstrates that AFIs are not and cannot be substitutes for state entitlements in meeting the food security needs of low-income people.

## CONCLUSIONS

Alternative agrifood movements have looked hopefully toward AFIs such as farmers’ markets and CSAs as institutions that can help address the growing problem of food insecurity in the U.S. What we found, though, is that while most managers of such institutions express general interest in questions of food security, their actual practices to further these ends are constrained by both practical issues and perspectives about low-income assistance, including some skepticism of redistributive models. As a rule, farm security trumps food security, even though farmers’ markets and CSAs are often described as “win-win” opportunities for both producers and consumers. When consumers are affluent, CSAs and farmers’ markets may truly be “win-win.” Consumers get fresh produce, and farmers retain a larger share of the food dollar. However, it is not clear that these AFIs can provide an easy win-win solution for lower income consumers. Understanding who is included in and excluded from the circle of winners and under what circumstances is crucial to understanding the potential of AFIs for meeting farmers’ and consumers’ needs. AFIs can provide many things, including fresh produce from local sources, and personal relationships between consumers and farmers, but given existing economic constraints they are not currently positioned to meet the goal of food security.



Despite the incompatibility between food and farm security in AFIs evidenced in this study, there are important exceptions and visionary ideas. A number of AFIs have both institutional missions and capacities to address these issues. In many cases, it is the subsidies of the non-profit sector that make the work of these AFIs possible. We applaud these efforts, yet see them as inevitably ephemeral, for they are subject to the vagaries of philanthropic priority changes, the volatility of the stock market that determines foundation resources, and the presence or absence of effective leaders.

The key to meeting food security needs remains public entitlement programs. While our study highlights some of the limitations of current CSAs and farmers' markets for low-income consumers, it also points to important areas for federal and state policy change. For example, if the USDA and the Food and Nutrition Service provided more substantial and sustained funding for the FMNP program and EBT infrastructure, and if these programs were expanded to more easily address the needs of CSAs, farm security and food security might not be so at odds in these AFIs. Still, as many within the CFS movement recognize, in order to provide food security for low-income people, entitlements must be exactly that—things that are *guaranteed*.

Note: A more extensive report on this research appears in Guthman, J., P. Allen, and A. Morris, 2006. *Rural Sociology* 71(4)

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**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup>Farmers' market data analysis is more complicated than CSA data analysis because many managers run multiple markets (which may have different demographics and at which managers may use different strategies). We requested that managers respond to questions that were not specific to a particular market only once. Responses to these questions were compared to averages among a particular manager's markets rather than to each market individually.

<sup>2</sup>A share represents the number of participants in a CSA. Participants agree to purchase a box of food on a weekly, bi-weekly, or seasonal basis.

<sup>3</sup>Not all CSA managers (or farmers' market managers) answered our questions about organizational type.

<sup>4</sup>According to Patty Blomberg, California's FMNP coordinator, this is an underestimate of the percentage of California markets actually accepting FMNP benefits.

<sup>5</sup>We have not included a table for the CSA data since it provides no additional information than what is stated in the text.

<sup>6</sup>Significantly, these data do not include two of the largest non-profit markets in the state, which would likely affect the results even more in this direction.

<sup>7</sup>From a different perspective, however, another CSA manager pointed out that part of the reason for such limited CSA participation by low-income people may be that CSA boxes might "feel like something they get from a food bank."

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*Photos, page 1.* Jered Lawson (top and bottom), Jon Kersey (center).