

**COMMUNITY-SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE:
A POSSIBLE SOLUTION FOR ROMANIAN FARMERS?**

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Abstract. *No matter its name – Community-Shared Agriculture, Community-Sponsored Agriculture, Community-Supported Agriculture, or Solidarity Farming – this is a type of agriculture in which farms are supported by local consumers who purchase pre-paid shares of agricultural production thus benefiting both farmers and consumers. This paper presents different types of Community-Supported Agriculture (including the Teikei system and its principles) and its features, Community-Supported Agriculture consumers, as well as the requirements of Community-Supported Agriculture – all of which supports the idea that this type of farming might be a solution for Romanian farmers.*

Keywords: *Community-Supported Agriculture, Romania, agriculture*

INTRODUCTION

Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) (UK) has been defined as “a system in which a farm operation is supported by shareholders within the community who share both the benefits and risks of food production” [12] and as “a system in which a farm is supported by local consumers who purchase prepaid shares in the farm's output which they receive periodically throughout the growing season” [12]. The first known use of the noun **Community-Supported Agriculture** in this meaning dates back in 1987 [14].

It is also called **Community-Shared Agriculture** (Canada), **Community-Sponsored Agriculture** (USA) and **Solidarity Farming** (USA).

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The **research method** used in this paper is *analytical*. We defined **Community-Supported Agriculture** and then analysed its specific types, features, consumers, and practice.

The **material** used consists in *books* and *articles* on **Community-Supported Agriculture**, materials published in Romania and abroad in the last twenty-five years and made available to the wide public via the Internet.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Wilkinson [15], there are several types of community-supported agriculture programmes:

- **“Farmer Managed**, in which the farmer organizes and markets a community-supported agriculture program, recruiting subscribers and determining all management decisions (e.g., which crops will be grown and the frequency of deliveries);
- **Shareholder/Subscriber Managed**, in which local residents organize a community-supported agriculture program and hire a farmer to grow specific crops or other products;
- **Farmer Cooperative Managed**, in which multiple farmers organize and market a community-supported agriculture program, an arrangement that permits the farmers to offer a wider variety of products (e.g., eggs, fruit, meat, or milk) to their subscribers;
- **Farmer-Shareholder Cooperative Managed**, in which local residents and nearby farmers jointly own the community-supported agriculture program's resources and together manage all aspects of the program”.

The *Teikei system* [13] is a variant of “Farmer-Shareholder Cooperative Managed” community-supported agriculture programme. Developed around 1965, “this system is a producer-consumer co-partnership [...] developed by a small group of Japanese women involved in food safety, pesticide use, processed and imported foods, and the corresponding decrease in the regional small-scale farming population in Japan whose primary objectives are to create an alternative distribution system independent of the conventional produce market, to develop a better way of life through mutually supportive producer/consumer interactions and cooperation, and to develop a mutual understanding of the needs of both producers and consumers”. The Teikei system relies on ten founding principles:

- “The *Principle of Mutual Assistance*, intended to direct both consumers and producers toward a mutually supportive and beneficial relationship based on a shared understanding of each other’s needs and desires.
- The *Principle of Intended Production*, intended to guide growers to produce the maximum diversity and highest quality of produce within the production capacities of the farm unit.
- The *Principle of Accepting the Produce*, encouraging consumers to accept the produce that has been grown in accordance with the previous consultations between growers and consumers; their diet should depend as much as possible on the produce provided.
- The *Principle of Mutual Concession in the Price Setting Decision*, encouraging the use of full disclosure and an open discussion of the true costs and benefits of community-supported agriculture for both producer and consumer when establishing the price of a given community-supported agriculture share.
- The *Principle of Deepening Friendships*, founded on the assumption that enduring partnerships require true friendships, and encouraging frequent contact among community-supported agriculture members and producers.
- The *Principle of Self-distribution*, encouraging reliance on the producer or shareholders for the distribution of community-supported agriculture shares and discourages the use of professional transporters.
- The *Principle of Democratic Management*, encouraging both producer and consumers to practice democratic decision making with shared responsibilities.
- The *Principle of Learning Among Each Group*, encouraging the continued development of friendship and non-material culture, in order to avoid the tendency for community-supported agriculture to devolve into an exclusively commodity/trade-based relationship.
- The *Principle of Maintaining the Appropriate Group Scale*, encouraging the limitation of scale to appropriate levels.
- The *Principle of Steady Development*, encouraging the continued effort of engaging in mutual cooperation in order to achieve satisfactory conditions for both producer and consumer groups” [10].

Community-Supported Agriculture is characterised by [7]:

- *Community connection* between local farms and local residents (“local organic produce in exchange for a small fee and/or the subscriber’s labour at harvest”);
- *Consistency of produce quality*;
- *Contract plans* that “can specify a type of payment plan to be used”, help a producer plan for length of production, and may contain language that manages a farm’s liability for food safety in cases of customers mishandling or misusing community-supported agriculture products;
- *Delivery* (convenience of receiving fresh food from the farm);

- **Good communication** (advertising at co-operatives, churches, farmers markets, government offices, health food stores, local community centres; e-mail; one-on-one conversations on the farm; newsletters; recipe ideas with deliveries; social networks such as Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter; websites);
- **Payment contingency plans** “for people that may not complete their instalment payments”;
- **Payment plans** that provide the desired early season working capital;
- **Pre-selling** based on an estimate “of the hourly wage rate that you would like to earn from your community-supported agriculture production, of the number of operator or hired labour hours to produce for the community-supported agriculture, and of production expenses for the community-supported agriculture season”;
- **Pricing according to nearby community-supported agriculture cases**;
- **Shares / Subscriptions** (“boxes of produce that would supply the weekly needs of a family of four”);
- **Waiting lists** (lists of potential members maintained by the community-supported agriculture operator).

Community-Supported Agriculture consumers fall into two general categories [7]:

- “Upper-middle class consumers with above-average incomes and some interest in buying higher quality or local food;
- Consumers valuing the idea of local food enough to invest a substantial amount in it for the whole season”.

No matter the category, community-supported agriculture consumers are interested in the following:

- Freshness of the produce;
- Product diversity;
- Quality of the end produce;
- The farm and the way crops are grown.

According to Perez, Brown & Miles [9], the practice of Community Supported Agriculture requires:

- Special display and storage for vegetables (chilling sensitivity, ethylene sensitivity, low ethylene production, relative humidity, temperature);
- Special handling for fruits and vegetables (crop, chilling sensitivity, desirable harvest quality, optimum storage conditions – temperature and humidity, relative perishability);
- Special harvest (when and how to harvest) and post-harvest handling practices (humidity, packing, storage, temperature);
- Special harvest amounts for full and half shares;
- Special harvest record;
- Special pack presentation and placement;
- Special “soil moisture by feel (soil moisture level, coarse – sand; heavy – clay loam, clay; light – loamy sand, sandy loam; medium – fine, sandy loam, silt loam)”.

Community-supported agriculture is increasingly popular in Romania, as well [4,8,10]. However, the remarks below speak of the difficulty of implementing CSA in Romania.

[1] Concluded that these systems do not proliferate in Romania because subscribers are not involved enough in farming activities and do not pay higher amounts of money for their subscription. Globalisation means that CSA systems can contribute to building a community around farmers: thus, the latter become some kind of family doctors, family farmers. The novelty here is that CSA systems can give individuals the opportunity to act

more sustainably for the entire communities they live in provided they remain open for subscription patterns change that depend on customer preferences. Farms adhering CSA should organize themselves in a national network based on the nation's capital through which this concept could be promoted more effectively.

[2] made the following remarks about CSA in Romania: “In spite of a flurry of agroecological initiatives in Romania over the past years (most of them not in the shape of CSA) the outlook is bleak. Every hour, three small-scale family farms disappear. Romania was a predominantly rural country until 10 years ago, but it is now experiencing accelerated rural flight. Due to high levels of poverty and marginalisation in the countryside, many Romanians are fleeing to larger cities or to western European countries. At the same time land-grabbing is a serious issue in Romania. Over the past few years, large parts of agricultural land were taken over either by big agri-business or by financial companies who see it as a safe investment. In 2015, 99.2% of small-scale farmers – peasants – worked 55.7% of Romania’s agricultural land while 0.8% of farmers – basically big companies – work 44.3% of its agricultural land. Nevertheless, there is some room for hope. First there is a reawakening of Romanian civil society that is quickly (re)discovering ecology and a solidarity economy. Many successful movements and initiatives working on these two topics were started in the past few years. This is an opportunity for CSA. Secondly, as a consequence of these movements, the Romanian government together with IUCN, The World Conservation Union, declared large areas of Transylvania (Central and Western Romania) to be protected areas of biodiversity. These areas contain a considerable number of villages where small-scale traditional agriculture is still being practiced.”

[3] mentioned that newly-entered farmers with no capital cannot access agricultural land because of prices fast escalation caused by intensive farming. Such farmers need to be supported (i.e., to gain access to the land they need to start a CSA. They also need training in agroecological methods and become more self-confident.

[6] noted that most Romanian small peasants find it difficult to identify a successor to take over their farms. If this is not the case, small farms are meant to be assimilated by larger farms, turned into non-agricultural units, or even abandoned. The first constraint emphasised by the Association for the Support of Peasant Agriculture (Romanian ASAT) is the transmission of the traditional model of farming to other farmers. This supports the hypothesis that Community-Supported Agriculture may provide small-scale bio food production in Romania a viable alternative for the “newly born farmers”. Larger ideals of Community-Supported Agriculture go hand in hand with the idea of taking land from the market and placing it under a more common, democratically managed land trust initiative.

CONCLUSIONS

Community-supported agriculture programmes [14]:

- Allow local food to be eaten fresh, with more nutrients;
- Control food supply, which results in a greater degree of food security;
- “Eliminate the middleman, creating opportunity for dialogue, increasing and stabilizing profits to farmers, and often reducing the costs to consumers;
- Emphasize biodiversity and good stewardship practices by sustaining farms that produce a wide range of crops”;
- Enable women that do not have other jobs to work;
- Encourage farmers to cooperate with other farmers;
- Improve consumer access to fresh, healthy agricultural products;
- Keep the money spent on food in the community, which determines a multiplier effect;
- Share risks between farmers and consumers;

- Stimulate farmers to cooperate in order to provide consumers a wider variety of products;
- Transport locally produced foods on a shorter distance to beneficiaries.

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