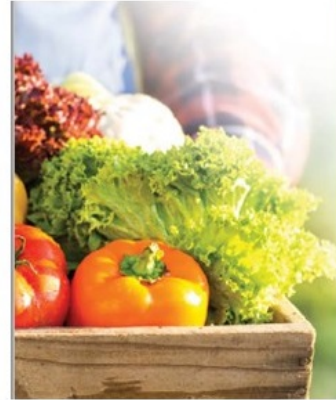


COMMUNITY SUPPORTED
AGRICULTURE (CSA)
CUSTOMER SATISFACTION
RESEARCH RESULTS

2018



Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Customer Satisfaction Research Project Results 2018



Brought to you by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and the Minnesota Grown Program. Funding for the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Customer Satisfaction Research Project Results 2018 was made possible by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service through grant No. AM170100XXXXG008. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the USDA.

Project Background

This inaugural research project was conducted by the Minnesota Grown Program at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture in 2017. Customers were surveyed about their experiences and opinions as subscriber members of one of the **14 participating CSAs** across Minnesota, the equivalent of **16% of all CSAs** in Minnesota Grown. A total of **440 customers returned surveys** and the **cumulative response rates were over 20%** with select farms reaching 32% response rates!

CSA farms eligible for this project were Minnesota Grown members and were recruited through various means including:

- Articles in Member Update, a monthly member newsletter for Minnesota Grown Program members
- Calls to farms to ensure awareness of the opportunity
- Conversations and presentations at association conferences and trade shows
- Emails sent directly to Minnesota Grown members
- Emails via listserves, such as SustAg, etc.
- Word of mouth

The Basics

14 participating farms

= **16% of all CSA farms** in Minnesota Grown Program

A total of **440 customers returned surveys.**



Tell us about your CSA experience and enter to win a \$25 CSA credit!

Please let us know what you thought of [CSA name] this past season by taking an online survey. Your feedback will help us provide you with better service!

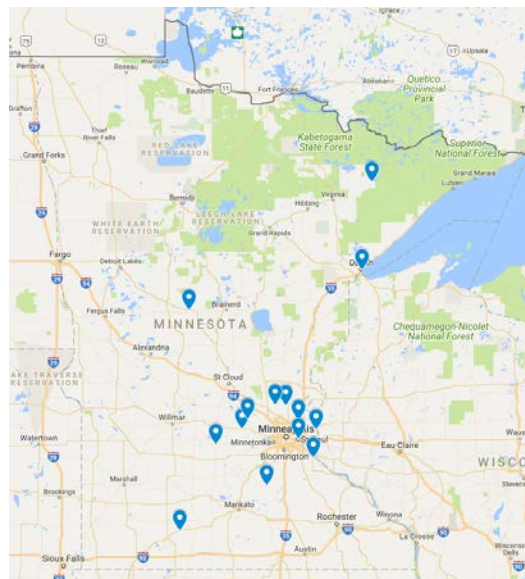
Take the survey at: [unique URL] or by scanning the QR code!

Thank you!




Customers received cards in their CSA orders or they received the same information from the farms via email. Every CSA had a unique URL and QR code to direct customers to their CSA's online survey. They then answered a series of survey questions. The survey was voluntary. A \$25 credit incentive per CSA was offered and one winner per CSA was selected at random. This report is a summary of their feedback across all farms surveyed!

CSA Farm Profile



- 0 to 20 years' experience
- Mix of CSA-only, large producers/secondary business line, & other: small producer/primarily CSA, and market/restaurant
- Summer, year-round, & spring/fall CSAs

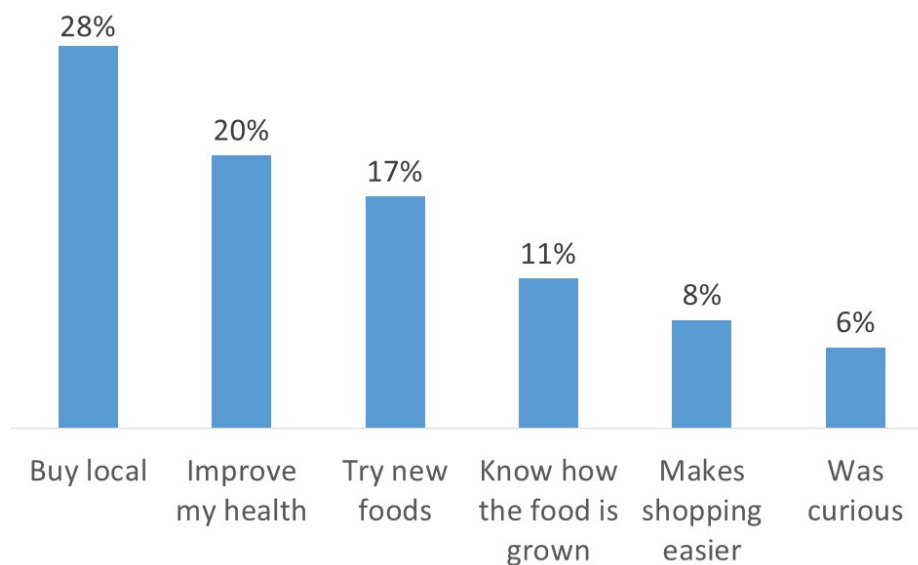
The CSA farms were a diverse group from across Minnesota. They varied in years of experience, mix of types of producers, and share seasons.

Customer Age Comparisons ([based on past customer research](#))

Other surveys have given us the opportunity to consider the average age of customers for various products. CSA subscribers are slightly younger than customers of other locally grown items we've surveyed.

- CSAs average age = 47 years old
- Apples average age = 47 years old
- Berries average age = 49 years old
- Christmas trees average age = 48 years old
- Farmers markets average age = 51 years old

Why join a CSA in the first place?



People could select as many reasons as they'd like and most people join to buy local, improve their health, and to try new foods.

Customer Quotes

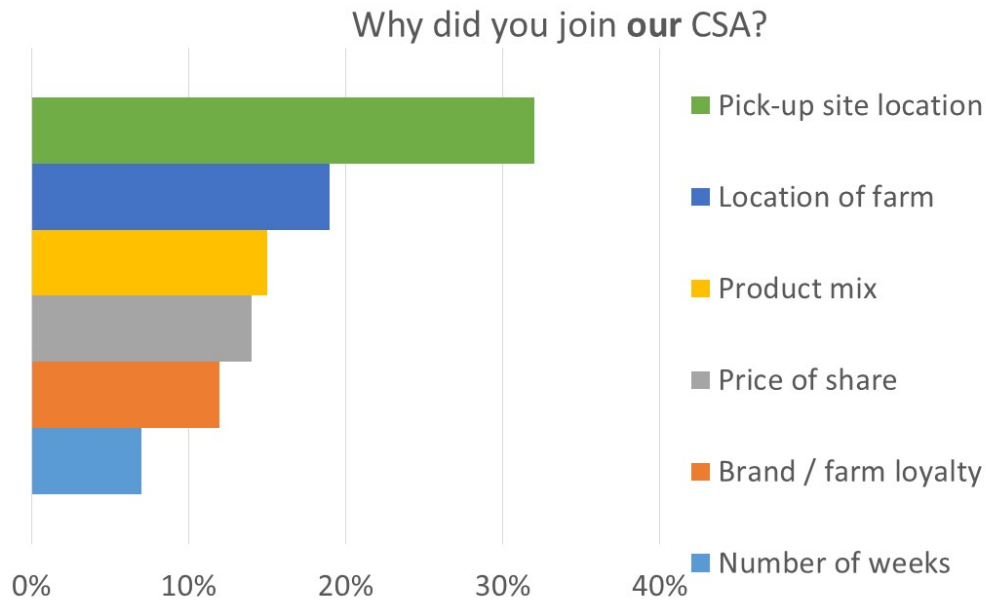
"Get great, fresh fruits and veggies all season long."

"Better quality than grocery stores."

"Organic produce and convenient location."

"To give back to my local farmers by purchasing direct from them."

"My kids love eating food from the farm where they can see it grown."



Similar to farmers market findings, the locations (pick-up site and farm) were key to which CSAs customers joined followed by product mix.

Customer Quotes

"Confidence in sound, ethical farming practices."

"Flexibility of choices in weekly share."

"Good value and care in selection."

"Organic."

"Great quality."

"My neighbors invited me to try it."

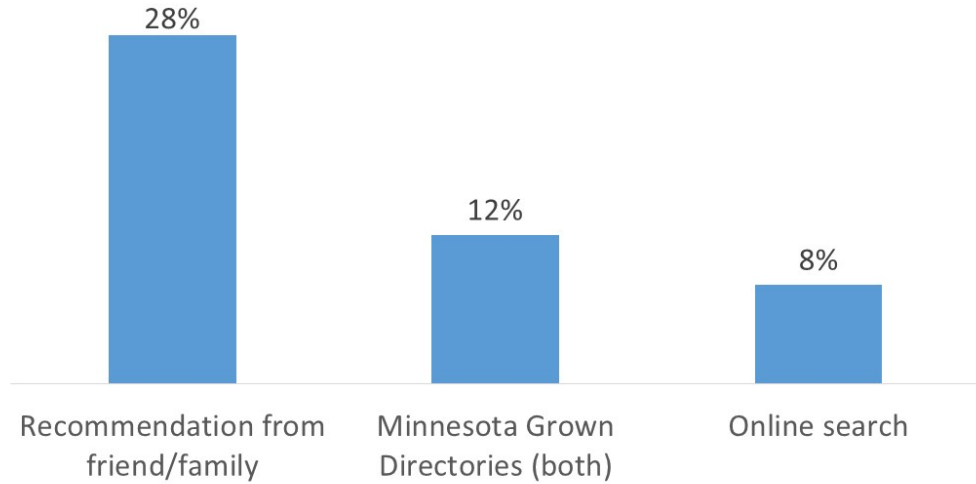
"Pre-pay option and shopping option vs. a set bundle of products each week."

"Small farm with high values towards shareholders and crops they grow."

"The freedom to skip a week when my family is out of town."

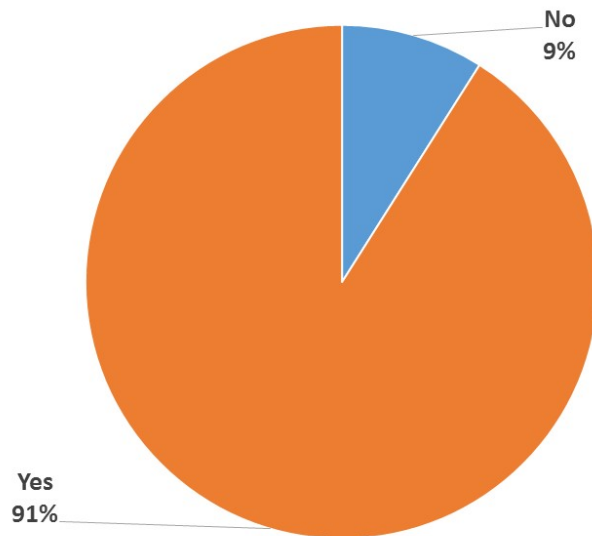
"Variety of add-ons, ease of purchase/communication online and personal reference."

Deciding on CSAs: Top 3 Influencers



There are many ways people learn about CSAs, everything from friends/family recommending a CSA to online searches. Over a quarter of the CSA subscribers (28%) were influenced by word of mouth (family/friends recommendation), followed by the Minnesota Grown Directories (both online and printed), and online search (8%).

Do you plan to rejoin for next season?



Customer Quotes

"I love getting vegetables in season, locally and sustainably grown as it gives me a greater connection to the seasons and it forces me to cook and preserve what I get in my share."

"Very friendly and extremely knowledgeable farmers. The produce/products were wonderfully presented."

"I was disappointed at the ripeness of the vegetables. We had a half share, pick up on Thursday, many of the veggies (peppers, eggplant, cuke, zucchini, squash) were spoiled (turning to slime) by Saturday. So the quantity was fine if the veggies lasted a week. We just could not eat that much in two days. I froze a lot and composted even more. Just overall overripe when picked."

"Although the season can be a little boring at first the mix of veggies by the end was fabulous!!"

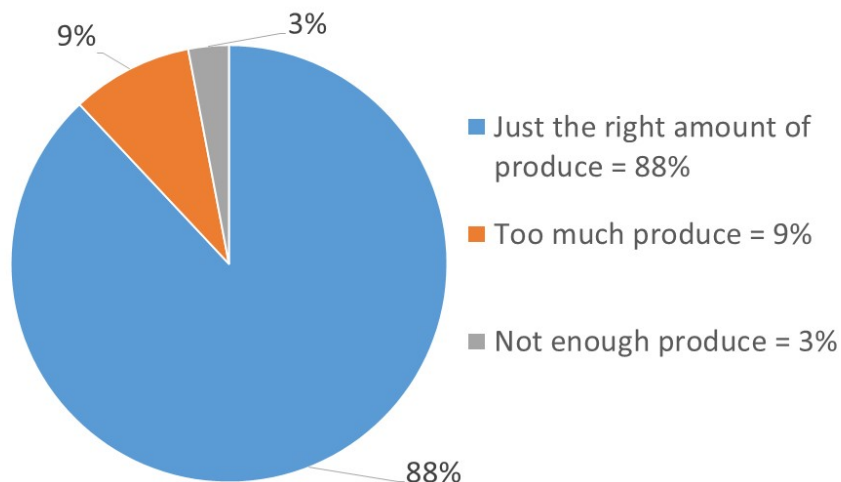
"As much as I enjoyed the experience, it was just too much for me and my busy lifestyle – out of town on the weekends, work lunches and dinners. Perhaps if I had another person eating the produce with me it would be fine."

"They are dependable and have outstanding service!"

"We may look for a CSA that produces entirely organic and pesticide-free crops; however, if that doesn't pan out we certainly would love to rejoin this CSA."

"Being a member of the CSA forces me to change my eating habits and I like the changes it has created."

Share Volume



Contrary to popular belief, the vast majority of subscribers (88%) felt it was just the right amount of produce. Only 9% thought it was too much produce.

Customer Quotes

"Even though I would not have purchased that much produce during the year, it forced me to eat healthier by finishing the veggies before the next week - thus I did not have stomach space for junk food."

"I ended up with some food that I just couldn't eat before it went bad. At one point during the months I was getting a pound or more of beans every week. I can't eat that many beans every week and they all ended up molding before I ate any."

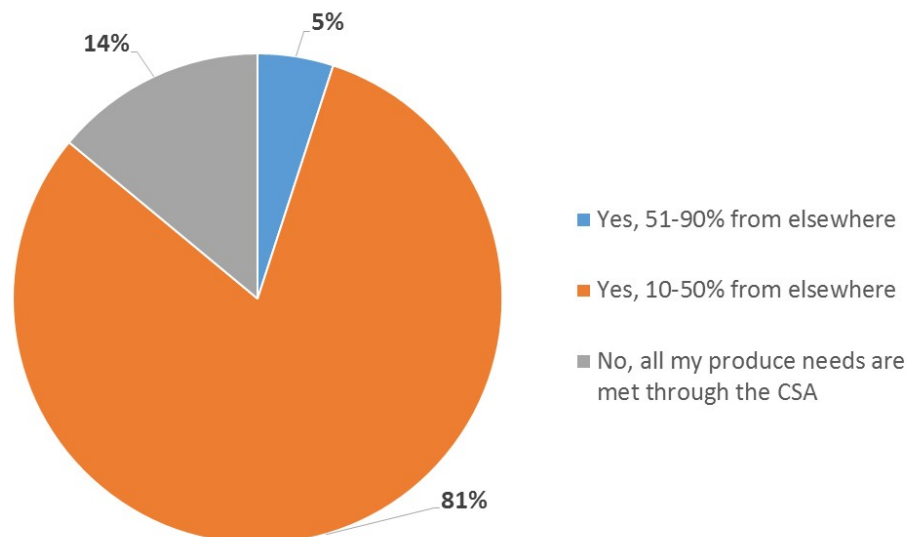
"The produce is grown following organic practices. It is fresh and lasts throughout the week. The suggestions on using the box help me use an unfamiliar product and give me great ideas for my menu planning. I definitely feel each box is worth the price."

"Usually at least half was food I dislike, so gave it away. So while I think the price for the box is more than reasonable, it ends up being too much, when I give half away."

"I love supporting a local farm, knowing where my produce comes from, and eating local, in-season vegetables and fruits. I've tried a few new things because of the CSA. I use Ottolenghi's cookbooks pretty extensively, and love getting my preview to do some meal-planning based on what will arrive in my box."

"It's the quality that's going to keep me coming back. Absolutely fantastic and I know that a lot of it will be turned into meals. I'm very busy so would rather share what I have rather than let any go to waste on those days I'm not around."

Do you supplement your CSA share with other produce?



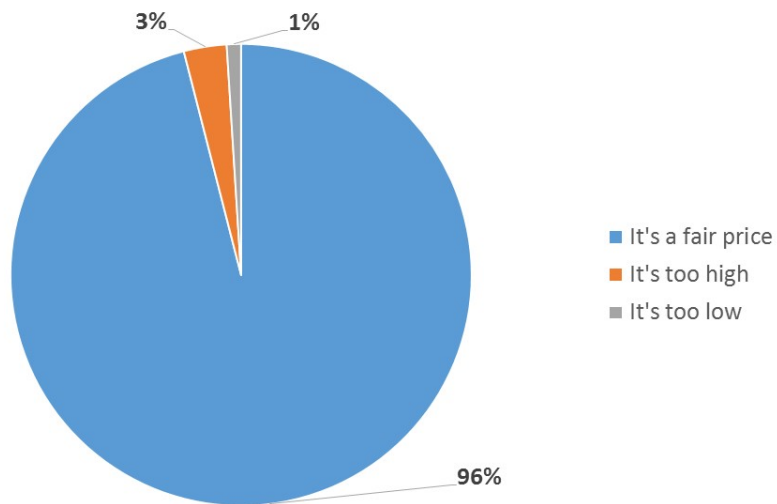
Most people (81%) supplement their CSA share from elsewhere.

Customer Quotes

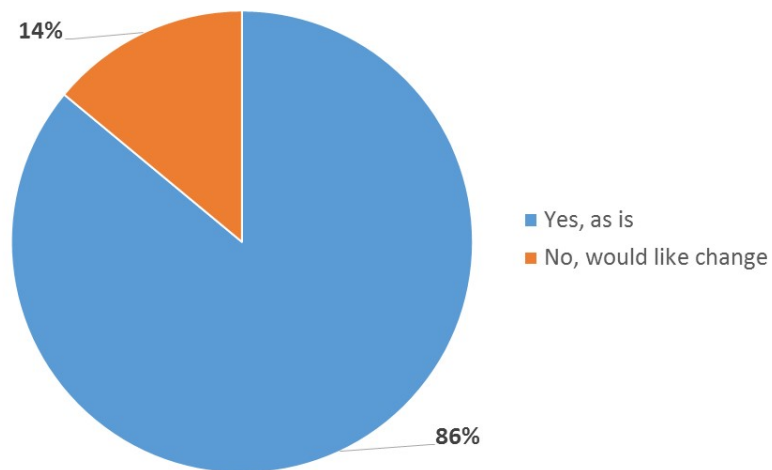
"We did buy occasional produce for specific needs but this provided most of our produce for the summer and I was able to make vegetarian lunches for work most weeks."

"For 4-5 months I don't have to go to the store for produce. I do buy some fruit at the store but almost 100% of my vegetable needs are met."

What do you think of the amount of produce for the price you pay?



Are you enjoying our CSA or would you suggest changes to our CSA?



Customer Quotes

“Adding a comment that I would like the ability to have a different pick up date! Tuesdays were not convenient but I also recognize that for majority they are often out of town on the weekends...I spend most of my weekends prepping & cooking.”

“An improvement that would allow me to sign up earlier would be if they would take installment payments. Like over three months on a credit card. It is a good value but coming up with that amount out of weekly budget does take some advance planning and saving!”

“The only, absolute only, negative feedback I have is on shelf life. I grew up on a farm, and feel like a lot of the produce received did not last long as it should. Things that should not go soft in three or four days, like carrots and beets, were a surprise to me that they did. That was a little disappointing.”

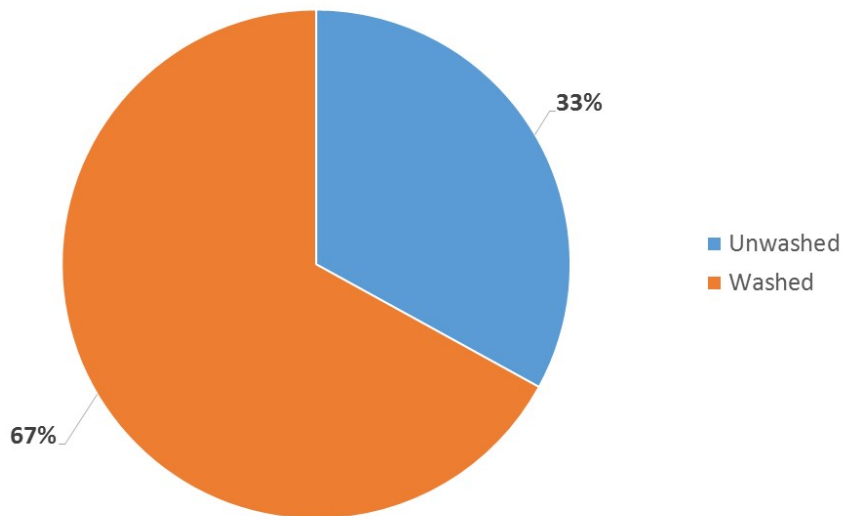
“Getting a basic list of ingredients sooner is always better. I get my list on Monday, but I usually grocery shop on Sunday. I would have loved to get the list a day earlier.”

“Organic produce for dirty dozen”

“I love that I can choose pre-packed or make my own, that I don't HAVE to buy every week, that I can stop by and buy just a couple things when needed. I also love that they are working with other local quality farmers so that they can offer meat, eggs, honey...”

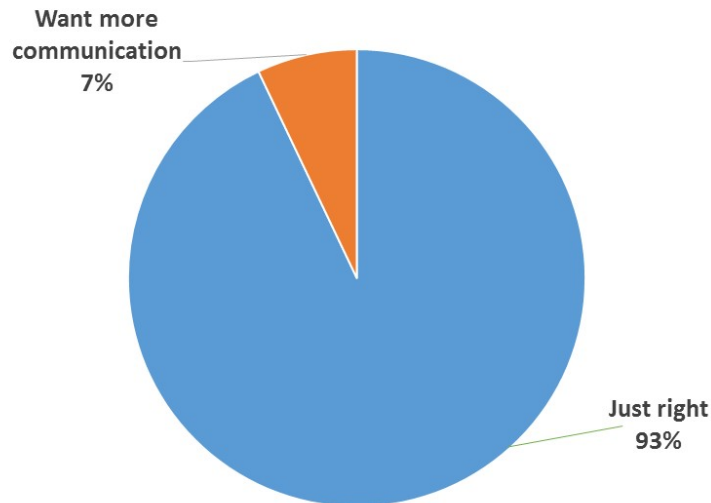
“Is there any way to get a smaller share? I feel overwhelmed with too much product in a 1/2 share for 2 people household.”

How do you prefer to receive your produce?



Two-thirds like their produce to be delivered washed with the remaining third prefer unwashed, often citing a longer shelf life.

What do you think about the amount of communication we provide about the CSA?



Customer Quotes

"LOVE the newsletter and the tips on the food and storage suggestions. Also really enjoyed the recipe ideas!"

"I like the advance list, so that I can share with others if need be, and I like the hints/recipes that align with the week's share."

"Would like to know a little in advance of what produce we receive in order to do meal planning."

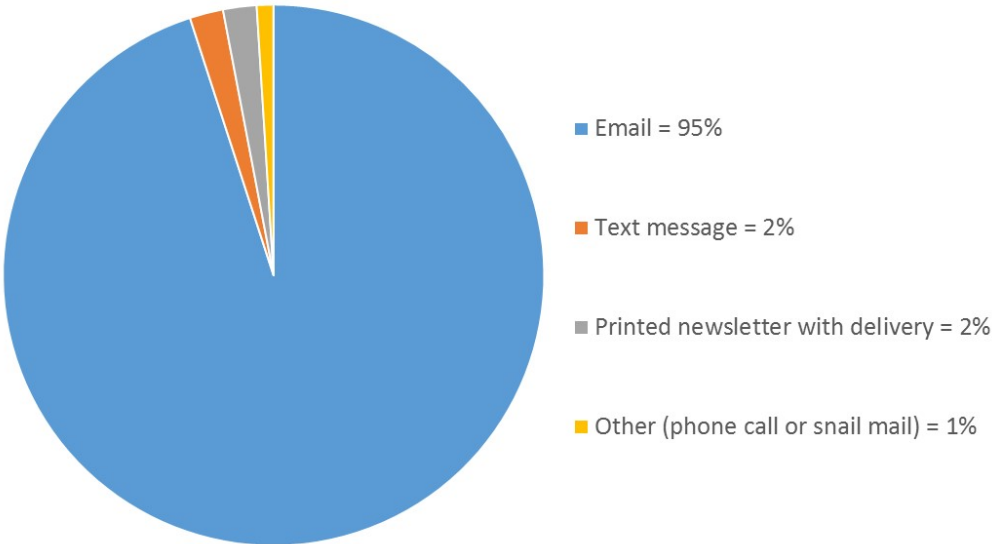
"I appreciated the weekly e-mail to let me know what was coming, and then the additional detailed e-mail about the box contents."

"If it would be possible to send out a blanket email or text to indicate the boxes are at pickup location, then I would know I can go pick it up."

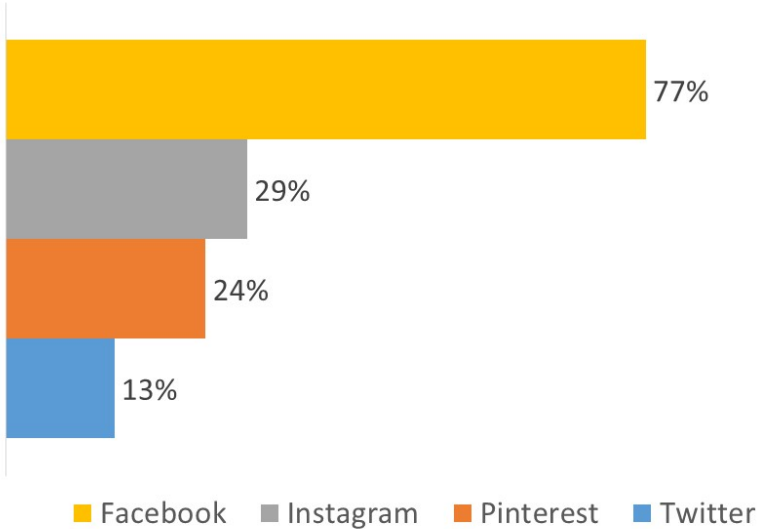
"Right timing and information, it allows for planning of meals based on what will be received/how long produce will last."

"I really appreciate the preview of the share on Mondays because it helps me plan meals for the week. I also enjoy the blog with recipe suggestions."

What is the best way for us to get information to you?

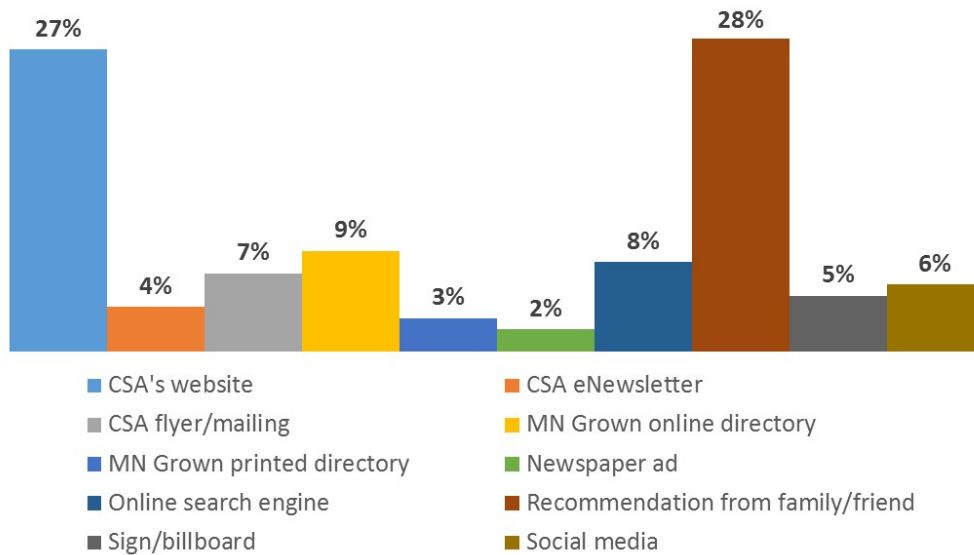


Social Media



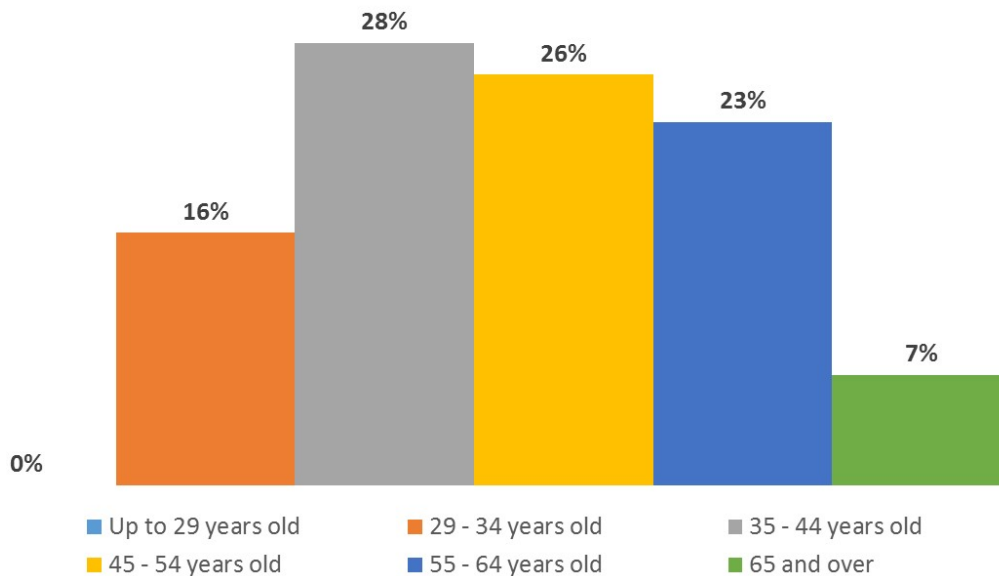
Once again, Facebook is queen of the social media with 77% of respondents using it at least once a week. Nearly 40% use it multiple times per day!

Which of the following influenced your decision to become a member of this CSA?



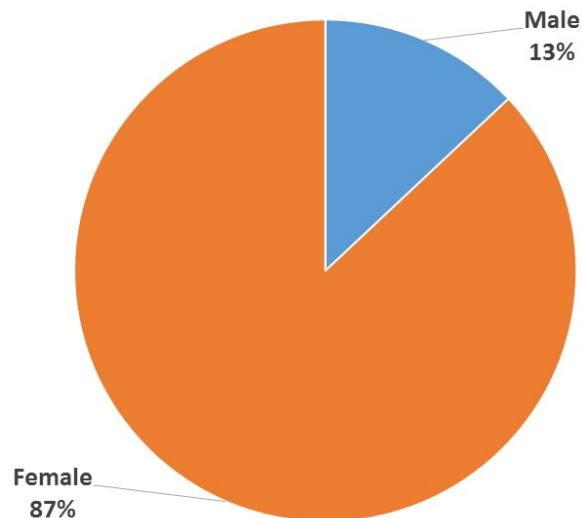
The top three influencers were recommendation from family or friend (28%), a CSA's website (27%), and the Minnesota Grown online directory (9%).

Who took the survey?



The two-thirds of respondents were between 35 and 64 years old, only slightly skewing towards the 35 to 44 year olds with an average age of 47 years old.

Who took the survey?



Key Findings

- 92% scored the quality of produce highly.
- 96% of CSA members are likely to recommend their CSAs to friends and family.
- The top three influencers were recommendation from family/friend (28%), followed by the Minnesota Grown Directories (12%), and online search (8%).
- Recommendations from family/friends and a CSA's website accounts for a combined 55% of all influencers when respondents were considering to become a member of a CSA.
- Two-thirds of customers are solidly in the 35 to 64 year old range with an average age of 47 years old.
- Buying local (28%), improving their health (20%), and trying new foods (17%) are the top three reasons customers joined a CSA in the first place.
- Location of the pick-up site (32%) and location of the farm (19%) are the top two reasons customers selected their CSAs, followed by product mix (15%).
- Most people (81%) supplement their CSA share from elsewhere. Usually to fulfill specific needs like fruit or recipe ingredients, or due to the seasonal nature of most CSAs.
- Two-thirds like their produce to be delivered washed with the remaining third prefer unwashed, often citing a longer shelf life.

- 77% of respondents use Facebook at least once a week with 40% using it multiple times per day.
- CSAs are doing a good job in communicating just the right amount (93%) and the best way to get information to shareholders is via email (95%).
- People wanted to know what they were receiving in advance of the CSA pick-up. In general, they said it was for meal planning, the timing of when they would go shopping in relation to the CSA pick-up, and to plan ahead if they were receiving something they may not use.

What did CSA farmers say about the survey process?

Feedback from the CSAs about the process was generally positive and we learned from them as well. Thank you for your feedback!

The CSA farmers appreciated the ease of participation in the research project and helping them accomplish market research they had not been able to do. Based on their comments, the information will be useful for buying and planning for next season and beyond.

CSA Farmers' Quotes

Easy

"It was easy and helped accomplish marketing research I haven't been able to do on my own. The questions encompassed exactly what I hope to know from my customers."

"I appreciated receiving the raw data (which was very easy to work with)"

Useful

"Thanks for getting this information out to us, it is very helpful as we plan for next year."

"It will really help us in planning for the next season."

"Thanks so much! This includes great information for us."

Data Collaboration and Sharing the Information

The aggregate report is posted online and also announced in the Member Update newsletter. Participating CSAs also received confidential, individual market reports including their summarized, anonymous data and customer comments.

These results were presented at the 2018 Upper Midwest Regional Fruit & Vegetable Growers Conference. After the presentations, we surveyed the audience:

96% of growers indicated they would make changes to their marketing strategies based on the information presented as a result of this research.

100% of growers indicated they would like to continue this research in another 4-5 years. Minnesota Grown intends to do so.

Anonymized data sharing and collaboration with select partners is important to help increase statewide demand for local products. Collaborative opportunities as a result of this research and with the anonymized data includes collaboration partners across the state.

We continue to listen to farmers, markets, producers, and business owners to increase the value of the results. [Contact us if you have any questions about this or other customer satisfaction research projects!](#)

