



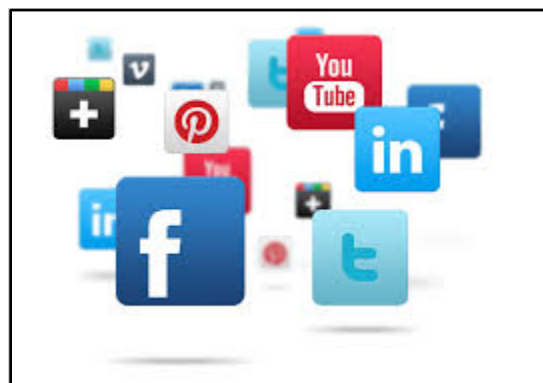
LEHIGH
UNIVERSITY



CSAs & Social Media

Catherine M. Ridings, Ph.D.
Zach G. Zacharia, Ph.D.
Lehigh University

Brian Butler, Ph.D.
Diane M. Travis
University of Maryland



June 2013

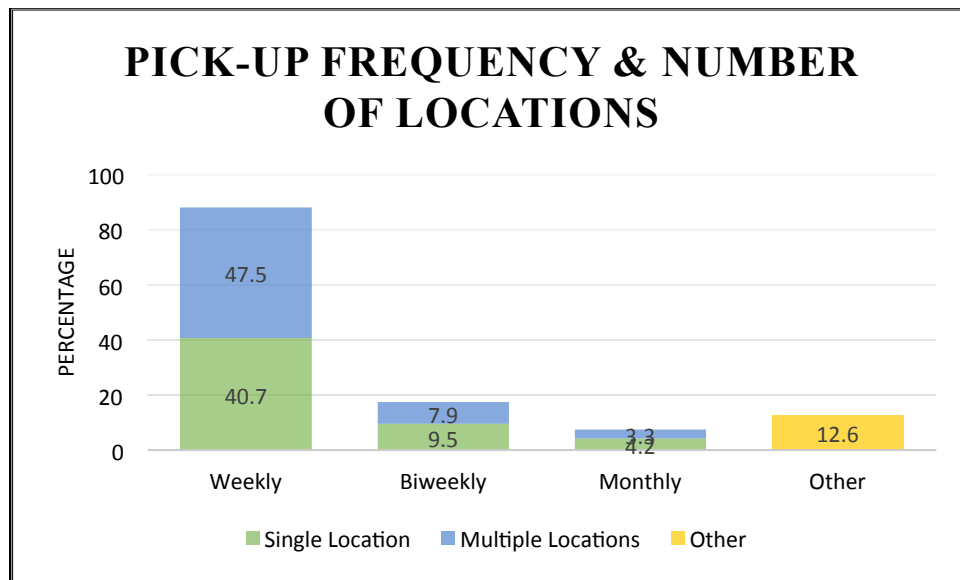
This work done in conjunction with Agricultural Marketing Service of the USDA,
agreement numbers 12-25-A-5661 and 12-25-A-5662

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs are an increasingly common way for farmers and others to develop markets for locally grown and locally produced food. But setting up a CSA requires organizers to make many choices about the participant services, products, and infrastructure for the CSA. In early 2013, researchers at Lehigh University and the University of Maryland conducted a survey to determine how different CSA providers design their programs, interact with their participants, and use the web and social media to support their CSA.

CSA Services Provided

858 CSA providers completed the survey. The majority of respondents were farmers running CSAs (763, 90%). While most have run their CSA between 2 and 10 years (74%), for 102 providers (12.5%) 2012 was their first year running a CSA. This is consistent with there being a growing interest in CSAs and a well-established community of experienced CSA operators.

Respondents report providing a wide range of services and features for their CSAs. In terms of pickup frequency, the majority (88.2%) offered weekly pick-up times. Overall, CSAs were evenly split between CSA’s that offered single and multiple pick-up times.



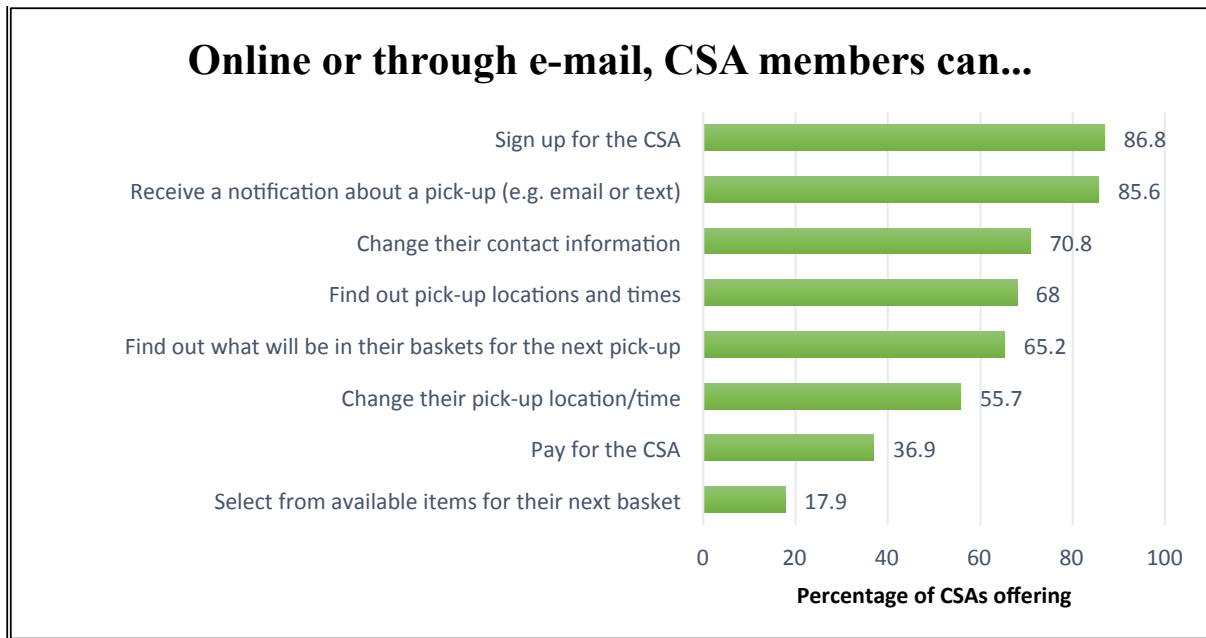
In addition, 44.4% of respondents report that they offer delivery to customers’ homes, offices or other individualized locations. 68.8% of CSA providers say that they offer between 7 - 12 items in their baskets, with 20.5 % offering between 1 and 6 and only 9.8% offering 13 or more. Innovation seems to be important to CSA providers with the majority of 54.1% trying 2-5 new products last year and 21.4% offering 6 or more new products.

CSA Use of Social Media and Web

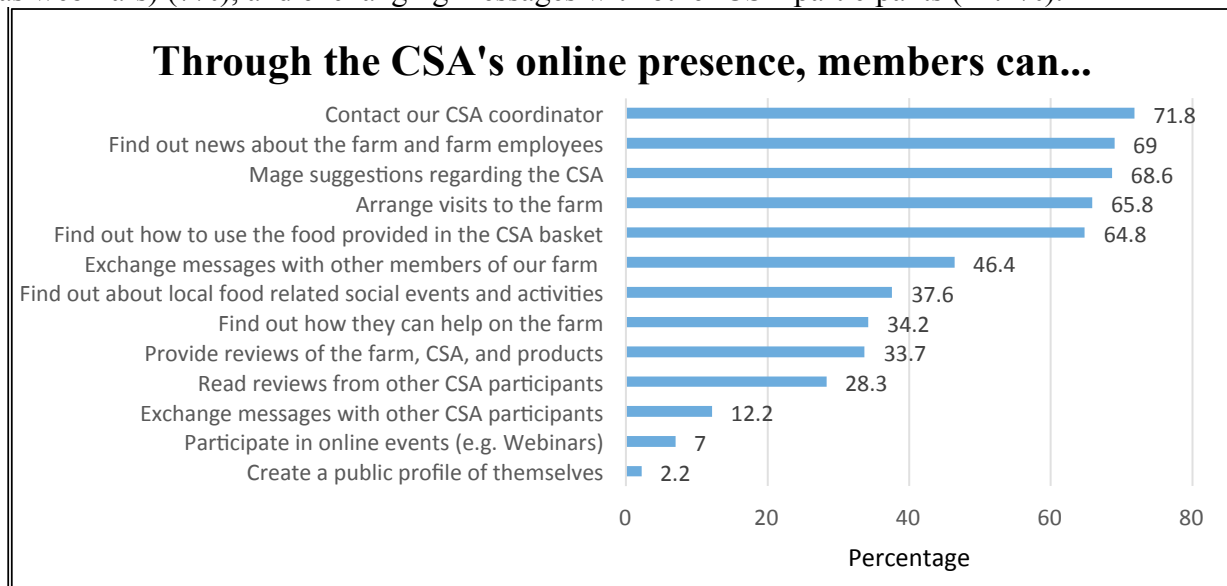
Social media is important to CSA providers as a way to connect and build relationships with their consumers. The most popular social media outlet is having a page or entry on another website (such as localharvest.com) with 95.6% of farmers saying that they update these profiles at least once a year. Having their own webpage is the second most common outlet with 83.6%

and Facebook follows with 73.9% of farmers using it. And even Twitter is used by 20.3% of CSA providers.

Many CSA providers have online tools for their consumers. More than 50% of CSA providers say that their tools include allowing consumers to: sign up for the CSA (86.8%), change their contact information (70.8%), receive a notification about a pickup (85.6%), find out what will be in their basket next pickup (65.2%), find out pickup locations and times (68%), and change the pickup location and times (55.7%).

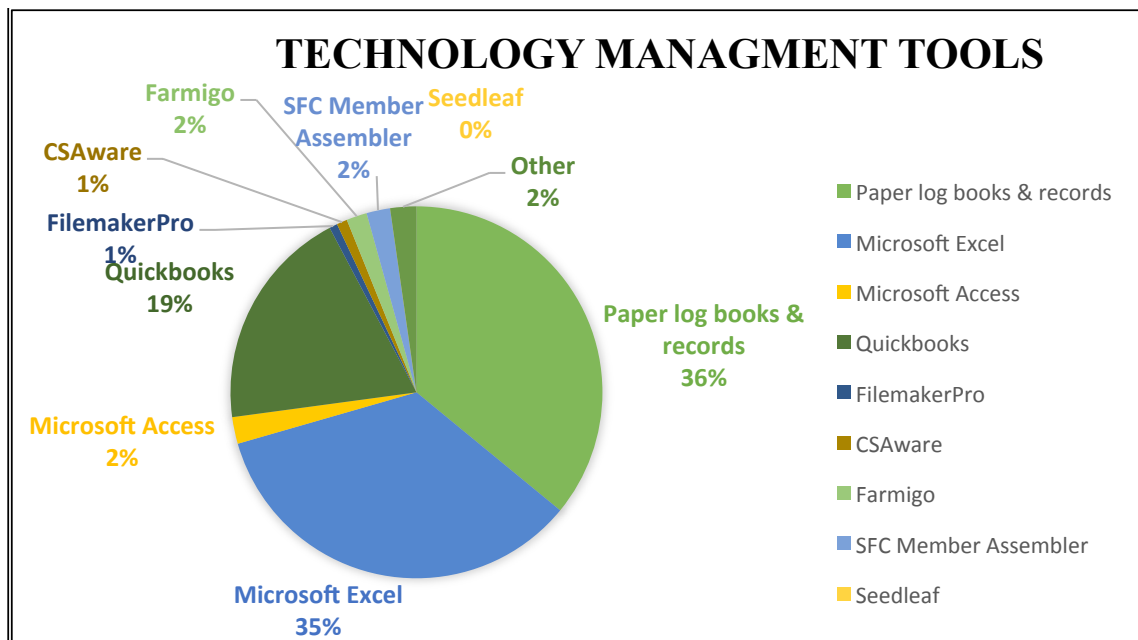


And through the specific CSA website, CSA members have access to a range of functions. The most popular ones are: contacting the CSA coordinator (71.8%), finding out news about the farm and farm employees (69%), and make suggestions about the CSA (68.6%). The least offered options are: creating a public profile for themselves (2.2%), participating in online events (such as webinars) (7%), and exchanging messages with other CSA participants (12.2%).



Use of Technology as a Management Tool

While the majority of providers still rely on paper logbooks and records, many other technologies are being used to help manage their businesses. The most common tools include Microsoft Excel (35%) and Quickbooks (19%). The tools that are not used as much are Seedleaf (0%), CSAware (1%), and FilemakerPro (1%).



23.8% of CSA providers said that they are likely to adopt software management tools in the next 2 years. 23.9% of providers are undecided on the matter and 50.3% said that it is unlikely that they will adopt a software management tool in the next 2 years.

CSA Member Satisfaction & Turnover

Providers were surveyed about how satisfied their members were with the CSA and the results were quite positive. The average perceived satisfaction with “the CSA in general” was 6.18 (of 7), with the “information we provide about the CSA” was 6.03 (of 7), with the “delivery and pickup of their CSA order” was 6.15 (of 7), with the “quality of the items in the CSA order” was 6.41 (of 7), and with the number of different items they get in their CSA baskets was 6.23 (of 7).

Retention of CSA members from year to year is a concern of many providers. Only 40.6% of CSA providers reported that they had more than 76% of their customers returning. 10% of providers said that they had less than 25% of their customers returning from last year.

CSA providers who had a low turnover rate (having more than 50% of their customers return), were more focused on relationship-building and customer service. This group was also more likely to allow their participants to select what items were to be put in their boxes online, and provide an online space for their members to connect and chat with each other. Other activities which contribute to lower turnover rates included: sending out online news, having a specified

CSA-coordinator, encouraging participants to visit and help on the farms, and having special events on farms.

Providers reported that they were generally satisfied with their CSA. Overall satisfaction level was 5.22 (of 7). Providers agreed that having the CSA is a useful part of their business (5.45 of 7) and were generally glad to be part of the CSA was averaged at 5.68 (of 7).