

## **Taking the C Seriously: Building Communities in Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Programs**

**Brian Butler & Diane Travis, University of Maryland  
Cathy Ridings & Zach Zachariah, Lehigh University**

### **Abstract:**

At the most abstract level, Community Support Agriculture (CSA) refers to a particular approach to community engagement and participation. Less philosophically, CSA efforts can build communities by building interpersonal relationships among members, farmers, and CSA operators. More concretely, CSA programs are characterized by specific contractual and logistical practices. While there is a growing body of advocacy writing and descriptive cases, less is known about how different components of CSAs relate to their operational, financial and behavioral outcomes. As a result, it is unclear how CSA operators can make the best decisions about how to run their programs for success. Social media and the Internet present similar issues. At the most abstract, “social commerce” is a fundamental shift from production, product, and consumers to interaction, relationships, and active participation. More concretely, social media technologies are tools that can be used to address logistical, communication, and transactional problems. However, like CSAs, while there is advocacy and examples, little is known about how adopting social media practices significantly affect operational, financial, and behavioral outcomes of CSAs. In this presentation we will describe results from a national survey of CSA operators designed to address questions of how specific CSA practices and use of social media technologies interact to affect performance of CSA programs. We will present three results that have emerged from our study. The first finding is that having a general relational focus in running a CSA is related to certain outcomes. The second is that different online activities will produce different impacts. And these two together suggests the third finding, that understanding community logic in CSA operation is important when making decisions about using technologies to facilitate CSA operation.