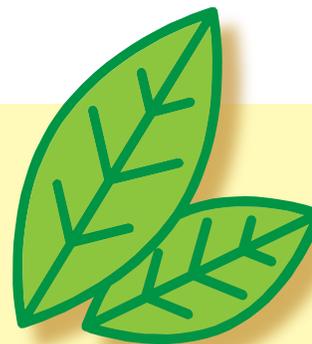


Chapter 7



Communications

The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.

—George Bernard Shaw

Communication is an important part of the business side of an urban farm, but it's also part of what puts the "community" in community-supported agriculture. We have to talk to each other to set up work teams, committees, schedules, and fundraising events, and we need to have clear and simple channels of communication. The goal is to use these channels to make the CSA function efficiently, which will create that sense of community, as we share a sense of accomplishment in growing our own food.

The question is how to communicate. Today, a lot of information is transmitted on the Internet, but for the first three years of our CSA, we did not really have an online pres-



Building community is a significant aspect of an urban CSA

ence. We had a page on the website of our parent organization with some information about share prices and contact information. For the most part, we communicated with members fairly effectively through emails and a newsletter that was sent by email and available in paper form at our Saturday pickup. We've also had a blog since the first year, so we have used electronic communication from the start. We greatly expanded that in our fourth year, and it has led to faster and easier communication in the long run, although it took some effort to set up the systems.

KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH CSA MEMBERS

Your urban CSA needs a membership committee to attract and retain members, but the communications team is also important, since everyone needs to know what is going on from week to week to stay involved and interested in the community farm.

The communications team for an urban CSA often works closely with many other teams, including the membership team, the work teams, and the social team. They may also work with the people who are doing fundraising to create announcements or flyers for special events.

We now communicate with members electronically with a website, email, a blog, Facebook, and Twitter, but we also retain some more traditional ways of letting people know what is going on, with a printed version of the newsletter still available on Saturday mornings at pickup, as well as various signs, posters, displays, cards, and brochures and flyers that we have to pass out to potential members.

Our CSA also sponsors monthly potluck dinners where members can meet and share recipes. After the dinner, we have a brief meeting or we socialize. Although electronic communication is effective and sometimes instantaneous, we've found that you can't beat a little face time among members to let people get to know one another and learn about how the CSA runs.

MAINTAINING AN ONLINE PRESENCE

Communication requires a small but hard-working team to cover all the bases. People with different skill sets can provide written material, logos and designs for printed brochures and a website, and of course you'll need people with those computer skills (or you'll have to plan to pay someone to design and set up a website).

The good news is that the electronic infrastructure really only needs to be set up one time; after that, it's a matter of maintaining and updating what you have in place. Getting the site set up may take time, depending on your vision and your expertise. There are simple ways to set up modest websites (WordPress, for example), some more complicated ways (registering a domain then setting up a site yourself using a web host), and some quite elaborate ways (hiring a web design firm to take care of the whole project for you—which may be less complicated but more expensive in the long run).

Whichever way you choose, you'll need to do a few things in advance:

- ▶ Decide what information you want to put online
- ▶ Write copy to provide text for the website
- ▶ Find some good images of your CSA (or use stock images) to get your message across—the Internet is a visual medium, so you don't want a lot of blocks of text because people won't take the time to read it all.

You'll also need to decide who will do the updates and maintenance. Another thing to remember is to make someone responsible for paying any fees associated with domain name registration and website hosting each year. It's a good idea to get websites and other online information set up in the off season; then the renewal will also come around in the off season when you have time to deal with it.

What to Put on Your Website

There are simple ways to create good-looking websites, and less is more in most cases. It's important to update sections of the website regularly—at least once a month is good. Calendars are useful, especially if you have meetings, regular work days, and pickup days to include, as well as:

- ▶ An About page that describes your CSA, its history, and what it has to offer
- ▶ A Contact page with how to contact someone from the CSA to join or find out more
- ▶ A Member page for announcements
- ▶ A Frequently Asked Questions page (this will save you a lot of emails and phone calls)
- ▶ A CSA Policy page (it's important for your CSA to set standard policy about things such as payments, work hours, missed pickups, and so forth)
- ▶ A page with an application to join the CSA (or a link to CSA management software that handles accounts)

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Examples of items in a CSA policy statement are shown on pages 71 and 86, and CSA management software is explained on page 88 in Chapter 8.

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PICKUP AT THE GREENHOUSE EVERY SATURDAY 10:00 am - 12:00 pm

ENRIGHT RIDGE URBAN ECO-VILLAGE
COMPLUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE

Enright Ridge Eco-Village CSA
Price Hill's Urban Agriculture Project

HOME

Community supported agriculture.

Community supported agriculture (CSA) is way of sustaining farming and farmers, often in urban areas. Consumers who are interested in safe, wholesome food come together to support a farm operation, creating a community farm in which all the "share holders" share the risks and benefits of food production on a local level.

CSAs take many forms, and the Enright Ridge CSA was formed in 2009 as a work co-op, with members sharing the work of growing food in backyards and community gardens in the Price Hill area of Cincinnati. Our CSA has grown each year, adding more land and more members. We are currently growing produce more than six months a year, feeding about 150 people with garden and farm plots that add up to about an acre of land.

We are continuing to grow, adding more land and more members. Our goal is to continue our own success with this community-based urban agriculture project, while working to

Find us on Facebook

Enright Ridge Urban EcoVillage CSA

Enright Ridge Urban EcoVillage CSA

http://enrightcsa.blogspot.com/2013/07/the-color-of-carrots.html

Enright CSA: The Color of Carrots

The Enright Ridge CSA is now in its 4th year growing food in Price Hill! If you are interested in joining the Enright Ridge CSA this season, visit our website at

19 hours ago near Cincinnati

229 people like the Enright Ridge Urban EcoVillage CSA.

The Enright Ridge CSA website home page includes navigation buttons and a Facebook page feed

Other useful pages include:

- ▶ Links to current and past newsletters
- ▶ Calendar of upcoming events
- ▶ Links to other community organizations in your neighborhood
- ▶ Links to local food groups in your area

And you will probably find that there is information specific to your urban CSA that you want to include. Selecting a website host and software that allow you to build on to your website as you go is a good idea, because you will want to modify the site over time.

It can be difficult to delegate work on the website, especially if you use proprietary software to maintain it, but it's also within the scope of one person's volunteer time to be responsible for the website. It's a good idea to share the online responsibilities by having different volunteers take care of different aspects of electronic communication, such as email, blogging, and management software, rather than trying to have several people responsible for overlapping electronic spheres of influence. If you have some people who have special skills, such as writing, photography, or illustration, you can get them involved as well, providing content for your website and blog.

Communicate Efficiently by Email

Communicating via email is vital these days. (You probably don't want to have to take time to make telephone calls unless absolutely necessary.) If you have any non-email users, be sure to make paper copies of your newsletter available, and/or use a bulletin board at pickup for announcements, but most important notifications will go by email.

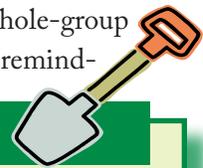
You can use automatic email systems to send out reminders of work days, pickup, meetings, payments due, and other regularly scheduled events. Search for information about setting up automatic emails online, ask about your website host's capabilities in this area, or depend on tech-savvy members. CSA management software also provides the ability to send out scheduled email automatically when someone joins, makes a payment, or takes other actions involving the management software.

Our CSA has some regularly scheduled events every month, including a potluck dinner and certain meetings. We need to remind all of our members of the potluck, and the members who are on committees need advance notice of regular meetings. To do this, we've set up a standard email that goes out one week before each event, with another that is sent the day before as a final reminder. We use a whole-group email to send the potluck reminders to every member, but we send the committee meeting reminders only to the members who are on that committee and whose email addresses are in a separate contact group. We use a program called Boomerang to set up the emails at the beginning of each month; you can find information about it and other email scheduling programs online.

It's important to have an up-to-date and accurate list of email addresses for your members. Ask for email addresses on your application and use a reliable program to maintain the list. CSA management software will also maintain a current email list. If possible, use a flag or tagging system to indicate which members are associated with certain work teams or committees to send out emails to specific people.

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The Boomerang website is at www.boomeranggmail.com.



Reach Members with a Blog

A blog is a simple way to interact with and inform your members. Although it can be used for announcements and news, it's also a way for members to share information among themselves, with recipes and preparation tips and news about other events at the CSA or in the community, and it might even be a place to post an inspiring poem or photograph.

Photos are important on the blog—images speak louder than words on the Internet. If you post a recipe, post a picture of the prepared dish. If you don't have one, look for a copyright-free or public domain photo that will suit the subject matter. You can find photos you can use without copyright restrictions at many sites, including Wikimedia Commons, Microsoft Office Images, and Public Domain Images.

Remember that not all image files work for a blog or a website—look for .jpg or .png file extensions to be sure the images will appear correctly online. If you have members with photography skills, ask them to take digital photographs of the work, produce, and events at the CSA for use online. Photos for a website or blog should be 72 dpi (dots per inch) resolution and image files should be fairly small, but not too small. A good rule of thumb is to keep the file size of images under 50K (kilobytes) so they don't take excessively long to load.



You can take your own photographs to illustrate your CSA website, or blog, or use stock photos from sites such as Wikimedia Commons

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Look for stock photos on Wikimedia Commons at commons.wikimedia.org, Microsoft Office Images at www.office.microsoft.com, and Public Domain Images at www.public-domain-image.com.

When cropping and resizing an image, to work out the approximate size you want the image to appear, multiply the number of inches by 72. This will give you the dimensions in pixels, the numerical value used by HTML code. For example, if you want an image to be about 4 inches high by 6 inches wide, the pixel height and width will be 288 by 432.

Update your blog year round and as often as you can (though of course it will have more entries in season than out). We post something every other day on average during the six months we are growing and picking up produce; in the other six months, we post a few times a month. Some ideas for blog posts:

- ▶ News about the planting, harvest, or improvements at your CSA
- ▶ Articles or news from elsewhere that support urban agriculture and the CSA model
- ▶ Seasonal information
- ▶ Recipes, recipes, recipes—ask for submissions, look online and in cookbooks (do give credit when recipes from elsewhere are used)

The setup time for a blog is minimal; you can go to a blogging site such as WordPress or Blogger and choose a design and a layout and set it up in just a few minutes. Anyone who is designated as an admin-

istrator of the blog can post items, and your members (and others) can choose to follow the blog. Anyone can add comments (they will probably need to sign in with an email address), and it's good to write blogs occasionally that encourage comments, by asking for ideas on how to prepare certain kinds of produce, for example.

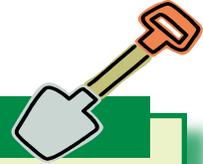
Remember that everything online is interconnected, so be sure to put a link to your website on your blog, and a link to your blog on your website.

Social Media

Social media is so much a part of many people's lives today that you can't ignore it. Businesses, churches, schools, bands, and farms all have Facebook pages so you can "like" them, but we've found that our Facebook page also really does create an online community of members who share preparation tips, ask questions, and talk about the great meals they've prepared with CSA produce. It seems like social media and related online ways to advertise and promote your cause, group, or business multiply every day.

One social media site to mention in particular is Earthineer. It's a social site specifically geared toward folks who are interested in sustainable living—like you, if you are helping to establish an urban CSA. It's been described as "Facebook for farmers, but way more interesting." It's got blogs and there is a barter-share-trade feature, as well as the standard post-and-comment format like Facebook. And it has local roots—Dan Adams, who started Earthineer, is a graduate of Northern Kentucky University. He announced the startup at a talk at the university in 2010. Join at www.earthineer.com to see what it has to offer.

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See Appendix B, *Using Social Media for Communications*, for details about the different ways you can use the Internet to let people know what's happening at your CSA.

USING TRADITIONAL FORMS OF COMMUNICATIONS

Electronic communication is important, but you don't want to forgo traditional forms of sharing information. There are still a few good old-fashioned ways you will need to communicate with your members.

Information at Pickup

Your CSA will have a regularly scheduled place and time for members to pick up their share each week—take advantage of this to communicate information. Have copies of a weekly newsletter available, and post important information at pickup, too. We have some signs and other information that change from week to week but there is also information that is always posted to remind members about CSA policy and activities. We have a rack with magazines and flyers of interest as well as a bookshelf of donated books that operates as an honor lending library.

Newsletters We e-publish a weekly newsletter during the growing season, and we print a few copies and have them available at our weekly pickup. The newsletter has an editor who takes submissions from members or writes articles to fill up the two-page format. It's not so much news as reminders and interesting tidbits. It's kind of funny, and it's colorful (though we print it in black and white, so you can only see how colorful it is if you read it online).

We can always use more submissions, but people do send in announcements of local events, recipes, and comments on what has been in past newsletters. We create our newsletter in Microsoft Publisher, although Microsoft Word or another word-processing or desktop publishing program could be used just as well. Then we make it into a PDF file, which makes it easier to print and to upload to our website (a simple procedure using the File Manager on any website provider).

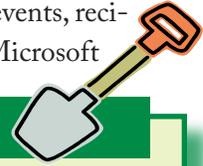
After it is posted, we update our website with a new link to the new edition (an archive list on the Newsletter page lets people see previous issues). Then we send out a group email (we use Gmail) to let everyone know the new edition is available. This takes no more than a half-hour every week and is a discrete task that can be assigned to a communications team member with moderate computer skills if the newsletter editor cannot or does not want to handle that part of it.

Bulletin Boards A bulletin board at your pickup location is a good tool for timely messages to CSA members. We use whiteboards to provide information about work locations and activities, and we also use one to list the week's harvest. Any information that changes frequently but needs to be displayed prominently for people to see when they come for their share can be communicated well with conspicuously placed notices on these kinds of boards.



A sign clearly indicating the type of produce and amount per share

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You can see an archive of Enright CSA weekly newsletters at <http://www.enright-csa.org/gazettearchives.html>.

Signs and Notes Our CSA puts out the various kinds of produce in the share each week, with small signs clipped to the baskets and other containers that lets people know how much to take per share. This works well for us and our signs are eye-catching and communicate well, because we're lucky enough to have someone whose day job is in design as our pickup team leader. But the main thing you want to do is be clear and concise, so you don't have dozens of people asking if you really mean 1 pound of okra, not 1 okra, or similar questions.

If your CSA packs up shares in advance for members to pick up, put a note or newsletter in each packed share. A list of what's included is helpful, especially if there are things that the members might not be familiar with (various kinds of greens, for example). You can also include notices of upcoming events or work opportunities or other information.

Flyers and Brochures

We use a variety of different printed materials to promote our CSA to potential new members. We have a nice three-fold, full-color brochure that we

print on a color printer, updating it each season with information about share costs and how to apply to become a member. We also have business cards that simply direct people who are interested to our website, where they can find the same information.

We have several different flyers that we pass out at neighborhood events and ecological, sustainable living, and outdoor events and festivals. Some of these are simple, directing people to our website through a QR code (short for “quick response code,” explained in more detail in Appendix B); others are event-specific or feature a promotion. For example, one season we offered people a bonus of five work hours earned in advance if they sent in their application and deposit by a certain date. You could include a coupon for a discount on the price of a share on a flyer as well.

We create PDF files as finished artwork for flyers and brochures to make it easy to share the files, so people who need print materials can print copies as needed and we don't print more than we need. We use some of these flyers and brochures during the off-season, especially in the months leading up to the start of a new growing season, when we are actively courting new members for our CSA. We've found that setting up a booth or table at local green events, such as a wildflower festival and Earth Day celebrations in April, is a way to distribute information about our urban CSA to an audience predisposed to be interested in what we are doing.

Displays

When we have volunteers to attend green events around town, they set up a table with information about how the CSA works. Trifold display boards are available at local hobby shops and school supply stores, and you can find a crafty volunteer or two among your members to create a nice eye-catching display. Don't clutter the boards too much, and don't use too much text on the boards. Lean toward images and short, simple phrases—keep the longer descriptions of how the CSA works for your brochure or direct people to your website.

One more way to make another kind of display to promote your CSA is to get t-shirts or cloth carrier bags, either silk-screened (this could be costly, unless you happen to have a silk screen artist among your members who is looking to fulfill a work requirement) or done with iron-on images. Office supply stores sell iron-on paper that can be printed on an inkjet printer from computer images, and the results look great on light-colored muslin bags or cotton t-shirts. Folks wearing the t-shirts or carrying the bags can serve as walking billboards for your urban CSA wherever they go.

Public Relations

Communication is often described as a two-way street, and we have definitely found that we need our members to communicate with us as much as we need staff and team leaders to communicate with the membership at large to get work done, have volunteers when we need them, get relevant information to the people who need it, and determine how the CSA is succeeding.

But there is definitely a third element to communications—publicity comes into the equation, letting the world at large know about your urban CSA. This is essentially a way to market your CSA (covered in Chapter 3, Finding People to Join Your CSA), but keep in mind that this is another task of the communications committee. You should find one or two volunteers who can let the local press know when something of interest happens at the urban farm—maybe hiring a new farmer, or winning a beautification award, or simply the first harvest of the season.

A FINAL WORD

You will use communications to recruit members at the start of your CSA and in subsequent seasons, and then you must communicate with those members to get volunteers to help with the work and to have the CSA's activities run smoothly. Beyond that, you will communicate information about the CSA to rally support (and grants) from the public at large, announce events and honors involving your CSA, and educate the public about what you are doing with a local urban agriculture project.

It's important to make sure you *are* communicating, and remember that the words *community* and *communication* have the same root. Both come from the Latin *communicare*, which means “to share or make common.” Share the information, share the work, and make common cause—and your CSA will thrive, both virtually and agriculturally. ■

