

## Policies and Practices to Promote Sustainable Agriculture

### Community Supported Agriculture programs (CSAs):

C.S.A.'s are farm operations which sell 'shares' to customers in advance of the growing season. In this arrangement, the customer pays upfront and gets weekly portions of whatever is harvested that week. The 'subscription' lasts over the course of the growing season, which varies with each farm, and the consumer's bounty changes with the season. A week in August might yield corn, beans, cucumbers, tomatoes, and basil. As fall comes, the harvest shifts to include squashes and cool-tolerant greens.

For farmers, CSAs mean capital upfront, and a guaranteed investment for the season. Consumers share in the risks and benefits with the farmer, resulting in greater ties between the producer and the consumer. For this reason, the Japanese translation of CSA is 'food with the farmer's face.'

There are now more than 1,700 C.S.A.'s, according to the nonprofit group Rodale Institute ([www.newfarm.org](http://www.newfarm.org)). This is consistent with a growth in very small farms, those from 10 to 49 acres. The number of such farms actually increased to 563,772 in 2002 from 530,902 in 1997, according to the latest farm census by the Department of Agriculture.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/21/>

### Increasing marketing opportunities for small farms

State governments are beginning to see small family farms as an asset capable to generate jobs and slowing suburban sprawl. To help such farms stay viable, some states are providing grants and other support. In Massachusetts, for instance, the Farm Viability Enhancement Program has helped 139 family farms stay in business by making grants to farms for new marketing projects.

Support for small farms comes from university-based programs as well. For example, The Small Farm Program at the University of California, Davis provides production and marketing information to small-scale, family-owned or managed farms or markets, often with limited resources. The program also work closely with farmers' market organizations to ensure alternative and profitable market access for small- and moderate-sized producers. [http://www.sfc.ucdavis.edu/docs/about\\_sfp.html](http://www.sfc.ucdavis.edu/docs/about_sfp.html)

### Fair Trade



It's impossible to get locally-grown coffee if you live in the continental US. But it is possible to get coffee that has been grown in ways that protect the environment while providing a fair wage to growers. The concept is called Fair Trade. While approaches vary, fair trade crops are typically grown on farms that involve third-party certification for environmental and social standards.

The importer also deals directly with a grower's association or cooperative. The means farmers earn more and keep more of the profits, enabling them to invest in education and health care for their families, as well as their farming operation.

To become Fair Trade certified, an importer must meet stringent international criteria, including paying a minimum price per pound, providing credit to farmers, and providing technical assistance such as help transitioning to organic farming.

Fair Trade is drifting into the mainstream. Northfield-based Kraft Foods recently entered into an agreement with the Rainforest Alliance, an international not-for-profit agency. As part of a multiyear arrangement, Kraft has agreed to purchase more than 5 million pounds of coffee in the first year from farms in Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Central America that have been certified by the alliance as sustainably managed. Under pressure from consumer groups, chains such as Starbucks are beginning to offer Fair Trade coffee.

sources: Chicago Tribune, January 21, 2004;  
<http://www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/fairtrade/coffee/>  
<http://www.coffeeresearch.org/politics/Starbucks%20Fairtrade.htm>

### **Cuba provides an example of an entire country can make the transition to a more sustainable**

During the Cold War, Cuba received substantial support from the USSR, including favorable deals on oil and petrochemicals such as fertilizers. From 1959 to 1989, well over 80% of Cuba's trade was with the USSR.

With the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, Soviet imports to Cuba dropped overall by 2/3 and favorable deal on petroleum dropped by over 1/2. That, along with the trade embargo imposed by the United States, meant that Cuba had no practical access to agricultural chemicals and the machinery necessary to provide the food needed.

These conditions have led Cuba to make organic farming a national priority. On an emergency basis, Cuba has turned to farming much of its land organically, with some amazing and well documented successes. Today, sustainable organic methods of cultivation are bringing back domestic food production and making better use of the country's limited resources.

Large tracts of land have been converted from cash crops for export to food crops for local consumption. Government incentives encourage people in urban centers to till the land for their own benefit. Oxen have been bred and trained in large numbers to replace tractors--for which there is no fuel or oil. These animals are also used to plow and transport crops to processing facilities and markets. Organic methods such as integrated pest management, crop rotation, and community scale composting are being implemented. Hundreds of bio-pesticide production facilities have been set up and are run mostly by local people.

Land reform plays a role, too. Huge state farms are being parceled out to local coops and individual farmers. In the cities, much of the unused land has been made available for individual cultivation, creating a vast system of organic urban gardens. The more than 8,000 gardens in Havana alone produced a reported 500,000 tons of food in 1998.

Cuba's research and development at the university level and its local extension agencies have advanced organic farming methods on a large scale. The National Institute for Basic Research in Tropical Agriculture (Instituto Nacional de Investigación de Viandas Tropicales - INIFAT) has research centers around the country that specialize in answering the specific problems of their area. Today, scientists and policymakers from around the world visit Cuba to learn from its methods.

Source: Institute for Food and Development Policy