

## Great Lakes CSA Conference 2008 Membership Recruitment & Retention

*Session Presentation by  
Hilary Moore  
Teamwork CSA, Almonte, Ontario*

Most people thrive on having a sense of community. Nurturing that instinct is one of my main motivations for having a CSA, and it shows through my efforts to involve and intrigue the community that I farm for. Many of my long-time members count on the sense of connection, ownership and familiar pleasure that the CSA brings to them.

Recruitment:

Finding Members:

- start with friends – ask a friend to invite friends to a coffee meeting to find out more about the CSA

- have a brochure that lists all of the important details of your farm on your person

- referrals always end up signing up with me

- I have had a single member come aboard on account of having my brochures in various stores and other public outlets

- list your name with a local “Buy Locally” focused organization

- websites and listings will result in many different “cold call” inquiries. It is a good idea to have some sort of form letter that you can personalize, to send to these people

- if I receive a recommendation, I make sure that they receive my focused attention. They are usually already educated to some degree on how things work, which means that if they are contacting you, they are already pretty much sold on the idea. I still make sure to go through everything with them, taking nothing for granted.

- I personally don't want a website. I find it an impersonal way to give details about the CSA. And I don't want to have to maintain it. Granted, it would be less work in the spring, when people are inquiring. But, I consider recruitment to be part of my winter and spring time work.

- By corresponding with each potential member by email or phone, we have a chance interact and get to know each other a tiny bit.

- my membership has done most of my marketing for me since my second year. My job is really just to prepare an updated brochure and answer emails and phone calls.

#### First Year Members:

- the first distribution of every year myself, my husband, Nick or an apprentice will stay at the pick up sites, to walk people through the routine. It's a great time to put a face to a name. It's also a good way to impart how by following the routine, they are being a huge help.

#### Communication:

- keeping in constant communication with people throughout the season is essential. Newsletters are a perfect and common resource.

- because life is busy enough during the summer without needing to assemble a newsletter, I ask the membership to volunteer to help. Every year brings a different level of involvement, which is reflected in the frequency of the newsletter. Newsletter items include an update from the farm, recipes, introductions of strange and new vegetables, pictures, and hopefully some community-food news (from members).

- at the end of the season, I provide a survey for people. It's an option, but I do encourage people to fill it out. More importantly than having a survey, I take people's comments into consideration. I think that people appreciate seeing that their feedback has influenced the way the farm runs: what we grow, how the distribution system is formatted, what kinds of social events people would like to have.

- in November, I put together an annual report for the membership. As shareholders, I think it is their right to see a detailed breakdown of the season. Included is a budget through until November, a table summary of what the share comprised, what the share value was, discussion about these results, discussion about the survey results and my personal view on the season, and changes that I foresee. This is another key component in my attempt to develop a sense of ownership on behalf of the members.

- by late January, 1<sup>st</sup> week of February, I like to send a letter to the previous year's members. This letter includes "the plan", what's new, etc. With this letter, I include a resubscription form with a firm deadline, before which the people can send in a deposit. This also allows the cash to start flowing early on. Once the deadline has passed, it is first come, first served.

#### Volunteering:

- I have an open door policy for people who wish to come and volunteer.