

GUIDE FOR ORGANIZATIONS

How to host a drop-off point for the Quebec **community supported agriculture (CSA)** network

Farmer's **baskets full of healthy,**
locally grown vegetables, delivered
directly to your workplace!

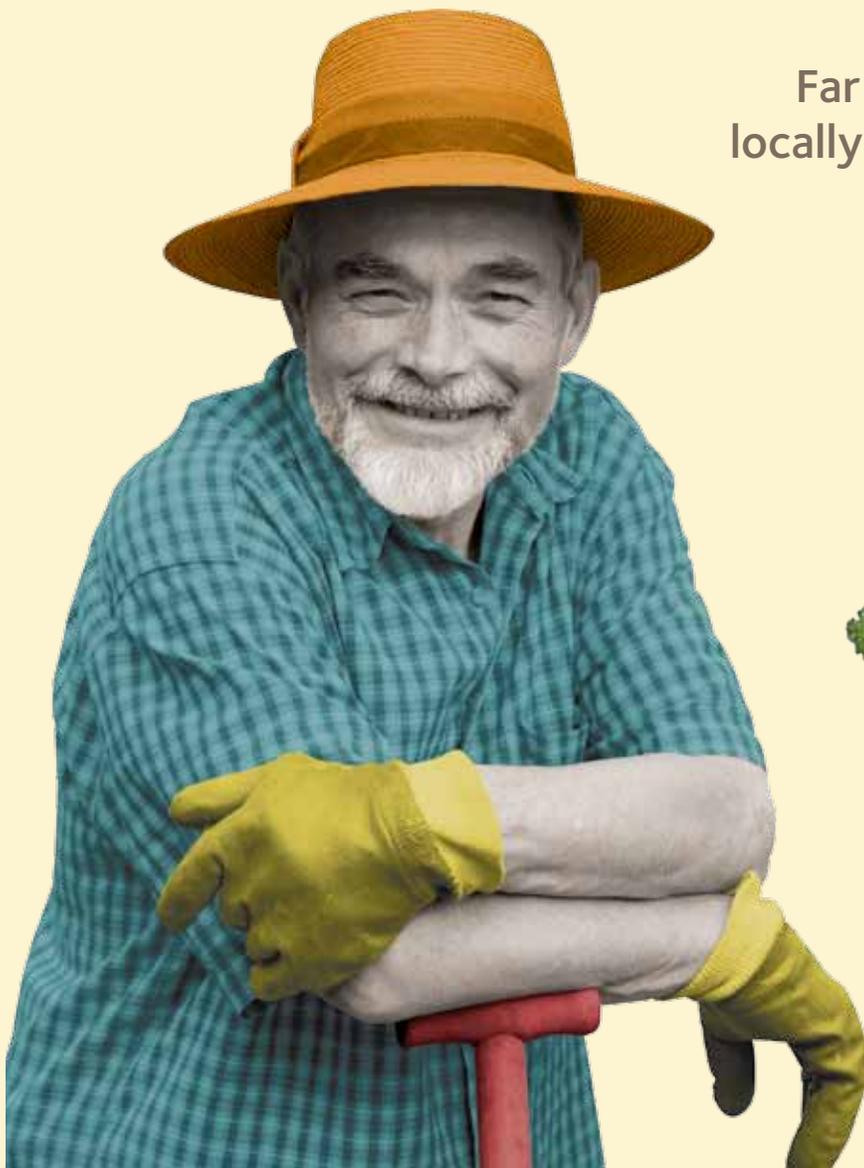


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Introduction

If you're reading this, you've probably heard about the vegetable and meat baskets available through Equiterre's community supported agriculture (CSA) network and would like to know how to set up your own in-house drop-off point so that your colleagues or employees can have easy access to fresh, locally grown produce.

Equiterre

Equiterre is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to help build a social movement by encouraging individuals, organizations and governments to make ecological and equitable choices, in a spirit of solidarity. We see the everyday choices we all make — food, transportation, housing, gardening, shopping — as an opportunity to change the world, one step at a time.

The history of our CSA network

We started in 1995 with a pilot project involving one farm and a group of about fifty "partners," who invested in advance for the right to a share of the harvest. This model — which had been around since the 1970s, with examples in Quebec, the United States, Europe and elsewhere in the world — introduced Equiterre to a different kind of food supply chain. We decided to promote the concept of direct farmer-consumer relationships and be a resource for farms that wanted to adopt it.

There were many goals associated with this project. We wanted to encourage the development of organic agriculture in Quebec by creating a consumer demand. We wanted to make organic, local products more accessible to the public. And we wanted people to be able to directly support their local farms. When the network officially launched in 1996, it included seven farms and about 250 partners. Of the 103 farms that make up the network today, 78 regularly deliver baskets to about 10,000 families and 25 offer complementary products (honey, apples, oil, etc.). Our family farmers provide food to an estimated more than 30,000 people!

Section 1: Why host a drop-off point?

1.1 Because organic agriculture is good for you

In Quebec, organic certification guarantees that a product has been produced according to the Québec Organic Reference Standards established by the Conseil des appellations réservées et des termes valorisants (CARTV), the sole competent authority responsible for organic designation in the province. Organic certification is an evaluation of production methods: organic techniques are respectful of the environment and human health, e.g., no synthetic inputs (pesticides or fertilizers) or genetically modified seeds.

All the farms in our network are either certified organic or in the process of becoming so. We insist!

Organic food is healthier for us and for the environment. No pesticides, chemical fertilizers, GMOs, synthetic hormones or antibiotics... If these products are not in our food, they can't harm our health or contaminate our soil or groundwater.

1.2 Organic, yes, but local, too!

Did you know that on average most of the food that we buy travels 2,400 km from field to fork? Because food that is grown locally does not have to travel as far, it results in fewer greenhouse gas emissions. When we buy locally grown, organic products, we are encouraging organic agriculture in Quebec, as well as helping create jobs and save the environment.

1.3 To help meet a community need

In spite of the increased availability of local products in public markets (including the new Quebec "solidarity markets"), demand for local farmers has only grown. According to a 2007¹ provincial study, demand far outstrips supply. The addition of more workplace drop-off points, especially in and around Montreal, will respond to a real need in the community.

Read what Chloé Dodinot, the person in charge of the drop-off point serving nearly 40 employees at Montreal company, Ubisoft, has to say about it.

Q: What motivated your organization to set up a drop-off point for a family farmer?

A: "Ubisoft has a very active environmental committee, especially since we adopted a sustainable development policy, which helped generate a lot of new ideas, including becoming a drop-off point for a farm through Equiterre. We stumbled on the idea just by chance, but when we conducted an initial survey, asking people if they would be interested, we were pleasantly surprised by the positive response. In just two days, more than 100 people told us, "Yes, we want to do it. Sign us up!" So we said, "Let's do this."

¹ The study is available on the Equiterre website: www.equiterre.org/publications. Le marché de l'ASC au Québec (The CSA market in Quebec). French only.

1.4 Other benefits for your organization

Q: What else does an organization stand to gain by setting up a drop-off point in the workplace?

According to Chloé Dodinot of Ubisoft:

A: “It’s so easy to pick up vegetables this way. At first, there was some scepticism — even I was sceptical — but within two weeks, all doubt disappeared.”

- The in-house drop-off point becomes a treasured place where employees can easily collect their supply of fresh, healthy fruits and vegetables.
- A drop-off point can help validate an organization’s social and environmental policy.
- It’s a chance for organizations to publicly demonstrate a commitment to local food and the fight against climate change. Show that you are building a better future!

Many organizations, including hospitals, large businesses and schools, have already set up family farmer drop-off points for their employees.

Section 2: How does it work?

Here is the information you need to successfully set up a drop-off point in your workplace.

2.1 Set up a drop-off point in 5 easy steps

Step 1

Choose an employee to be in charge of the drop-off point. It will be their job to manage communications between Equiterre, the farm and employees.

Step 2

The chosen employee surveys staff to see how many people are interested in participating. For a sample questionnaire, see Appendix 1. In general, a minimum of 20 to 25 employee partners is required.

Step 3

If the survey indicates a sufficient demand for a drop-off point, then the employee in charge contacts Equiterre, ideally between September and December (i.e., in time for the next summer season). This allows Equiterre to approach potential farms early enough for them to plan their production accordingly over winter.

infoasc@equiterre.org, 514 522-2000 ext. 223 or 1 877 272-6656, ext. 223

Step 4

Equiterre uses the information from the survey to pair the organization with a farm. Farms are chosen based on their experience, location and production capacity. The employee in charge of the drop-off point contacts the farm to draw up a general agreement and to establish the terms of delivery.

- Tell the farmer which employee will be in charge of the drop-off. This will be their contact person for the rest of the season.
- Choose the delivery day and time.
- Tell the farmer where to make the delivery (inside/outside, special arrangements to access site, etc.).
- Decide on alternative delivery times for holidays, vacations, etc.

Plan an information session.

- Equiterre presents the CSA network.
- The farm explains its operations and describes its products.
- Employees ask questions.

This meeting is an opportunity to lay the groundwork for a strong relationship with the farm.

- Finalize the details surrounding the drop-off point.
- Confirm feasibility of the drop-off point: is there enough interest?

N.B.: Equiterre can help plan the first information session.

Step 5

If there is enough employee interest, the employee in charge of the drop-off point contacts Equiterre to confirm participation.

2.2 Role of the employee in charge of the drop-off point

The person in charge of the drop-off point manages communications between Equiterre, the farm and participating employees throughout the year, from the beginning of the registration process to the end of the delivery period.

Responsibilities during the registration process:

- Distribute information on the family farmer program to all employees.
- Conduct a poll to determine the level of interest in the program.
- Reserve a meeting space.
- Encourage employees to attend the information session (Equiterre has free, customizable posters, as well as leaflets to help you with your campaign).
- Keep in regular contact with Equiterre and the farm.

Optional:

- Help the farmer by collecting registration forms and payment from participating employees.

Responsibilities during the season:

- Be there to greet the farmer at the beginning of each delivery (if necessary).
- Send information on the farm to participating members (if the farm doesn't do it directly).
- Keep the lines of communication open with your farmer so that if any problems arise, you can work honestly and frankly towards a solution together, contacting Equiterre only if necessary.
- Produce and send all employees a satisfaction survey to evaluate the success of the project and identify areas for improvement in the future (Equiterre can help you carry out the survey).

To avoid misunderstandings, make sure that the farm and the other employees have a clear understanding of your role and responsibilities.

2.3 Day, time, place of delivery

Every organization has their own way of doing it. It's important to figure out your organization's needs, and to discuss them with your farmer. Here's the Ubisoft formula:

Q: How are the baskets handed out at your drop-off point?

A: "We tried to find a weekday, ideally other than Monday or Friday, where employees could come get their baskets at the end of the day. At first, we held the drop-off inside, but then we realized that it was much more fun to do it outside, like a public market, at least during the summer! The people from the farm arrive, set out the bins, and the employees come between 4:30 and 5:30. They empty their bins into a reusable grocery bag and then head home."

For indoor deliveries, use a storage room or warehouse with easy access, that will be available for the exclusive use of the farmer during the drop-off. Make sure that your farmer agrees with the choice. And, remember, a refrigerator can be helpful for the safe storage of unclaimed baskets.

2.4 Basket facts (to share with employees)

2.4.1 Registration

The decision to become a partner requires full payment in advance for the share of the harvest that will be delivered each week of the summer. This allows the grower to have some income earlier in the season, making it easier to cover initial expenses and to plan production according to the number of baskets.

2.4.2 Delivery period

In general, the season lasts 16 to 20 weeks. Depending on the weather, it starts at the end of June or the beginning of July. Deliveries stop at the end of September or the end of October, depending on the farms.

2.4.3 Basket sizes

Basket size and price varies from farm to farm, but here are some typical examples:

1. Small basket (1 person): \$15 to \$20 a week
2. Regular basket (2 to 3 people): \$20 to \$30 a week
3. Family basket (4 or more people): \$30 to \$40 a week

The total price paid depends on the length of the season, as well as on the size of the basket.

2.4.4 What's in the baskets?

Contents of the basket depend on the growing season and weather conditions. The season usually begins with lots of greens and sometimes berries (e.g., strawberries). As the season progresses, the offering becomes more varied.

The farmer fills the baskets with fruits and vegetables harvested the same day or the day before. The final contents may be a surprise, but they are always fresh from the garden. At the beginning of the season, the farmer may also send you a list of the fruits and vegetables likely to appear in your basket.

All farms in our CSA network are either certified organic or in the process of becoming so (pre-certification) and fill their baskets with products that are 100% made in Quebec (with at least 75% of the contents coming from their own farm).

2.4.5 "Swap" baskets

Some of our farms provide a "swap" basket, where partners can exchange one unwanted item for something of equal value.

2.4.6 Sharing risks and benefits with the farmer

Our CSA network is not your average client-supplier relationship. The partner and the farm agree to share the risks and benefits for the coming season.

If the weather is bad, and the harvest is less plentiful, the baskets have fewer items with less variety. Conversely, if yields are good, then the partners get to partake in the surplus. The farmer introduces partners to different varieties of vegetables and gives advice or recipes to help partners get the most out of their baskets. The farmer also keeps the partners informed on what is happening in the fields over the course of the season, depending on the weather.

Partners are usually invited to visit their farms over the summer. They can also help out, with weeding, at harvest, etc.

The goal is to create a feeling of community and mutual understanding.



Questions?

If you have any questions, please contact the members of the community supported agriculture (CSA) team:

514 522-2000, ext. 223
1 877 272-6656, ext. 223
infoasc@equiterre.org

Appendix 1: Model questionnaire to gauge employee interest in hosting a drop-off point

1. Are you familiar with Equiterre?

Yes No

2. Have you heard about the Quebec community supported agriculture (CSA) network (farmer's baskets)?

Yes No

3. Would you like to know more about farmer's baskets and the CSA network?

Yes No

4. Would you be interested in receiving baskets of fruits and vegetables from a local organic farm, delivered directly to your workplace once a week?

Yes No

5. Have you already received a farmer's basket?

Yes No

6. Your contact information (optional)

Name: _____

Email: _____