



Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network

CSA Farmshare Survey

2014



SUMMARY REPORT



ABOUT THESE ANNUAL SURVEYS

Consumers are becoming increasingly concerned with where their food is coming from and how their food is grown. To reduce these concerns many are turning to transparent and local food production systems. The Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model, a common direct marketing strategy, is a great way to evaluate the success of these initiatives.

Since 2010, farms operating CSA/farmshare programs in Atlantic Canada have been invited to participate in an annual survey. Their members are sent a short confidential questionnaire providing constructive feedback on their experience with the CSA/farmshare program. This survey has served as an important feedback tool, helping to make stronger local food links within our communities.

In return, ACORN sends a response report specific to each farm, along with full analysis. ACORN is then able to analyze the full content of responses for market trends in Atlantic Canada. In 2013, ACORN compiled a [3-year trend report](#) for the Atlantic provinces based on this feedback from CSA/farmshare members.

In 2014, twelve questions were asked with the intent to help profile CSA/farmshare members, determine their motivations and key values, measure their level of satisfaction, and identify areas for improvement. Members generously shared their reasons for joining, as well as their favourite part of investing in the service. Importantly, they also indicated points of dissatisfaction and opportunities for improving and enhancing the overall experience. This was the first year surveys were available in both English and French. ACORN will also endeavor to make these CSA reports bilingual in the future.

The following report provides summary data for all CSA/farmshare member responses in 2014. Participating farmers can thus compare their individual results to overall data, and this information can be used to track the progress of CSA trends in Atlantic Canada as compared to previous years.

It is such a nice hopeful message to see young people trying to build an ecology-friendly traditional business that involves the family.

The best part of being a CSA member is being part of a network that encourages a young local family to produce a source of good fresh food that looks beautiful, smells wonderful, tastes great and can be purchased in our community. This is a "win-win" and at the end of the season, I always look forward to the next time this wonderful service becomes available. It is really something to be thankful for!

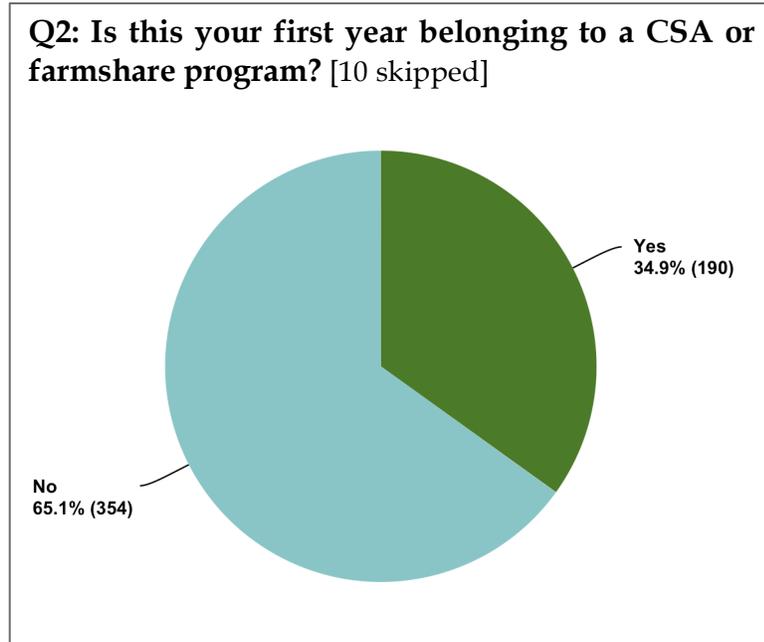


MEMBER PROFILES

In 2014, **554 total respondents** accessed the survey with 546 surveys submitted (i.e. respondents indicated they were finished, but may have skipped select questions). The response rate varied between 37.0% and 98.7% per question. Respondents most commonly skipped open-ended questions.

Survey respondents represent CSA Farmshare members of 17 farms covering each of the four provinces in the Atlantic Canadian region.

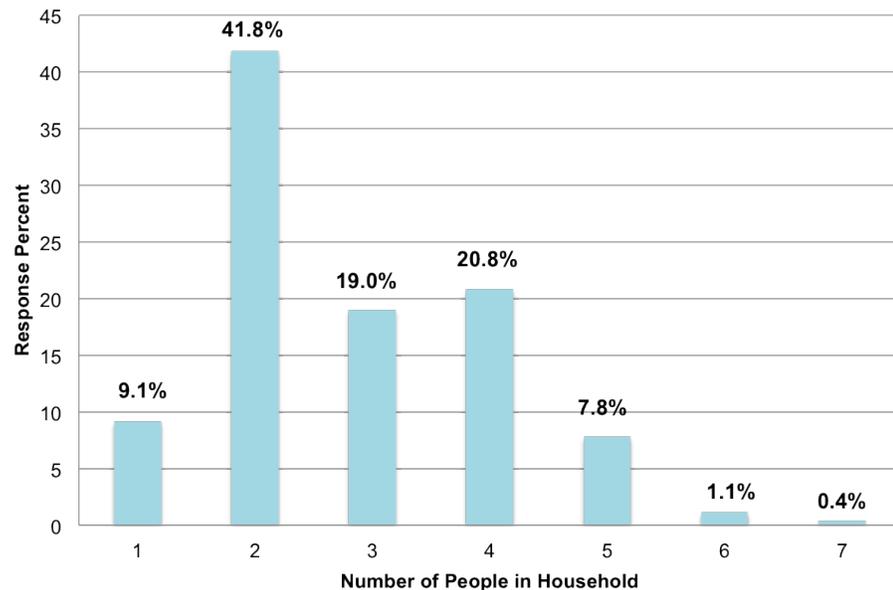
Q2: Is this your first year belonging to a CSA or farmshare program? [10 skipped]



The majority of members had previously belonged to a CSA and/or farmshare program, up slightly from 57.86% in 2013 to 65.1%. For the other 190 respondents, this was their first season participating in such a program.

Produce is shared within households ranging from one to seven people. **The vast majority of households have between two and four people, with the average household having 2.81 (i.e., 3) people.**

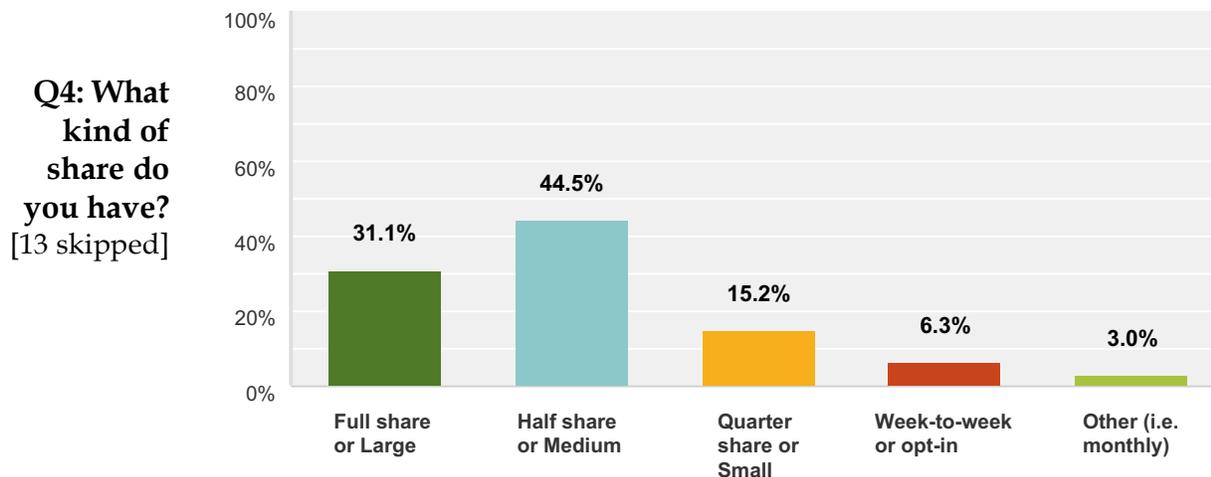
Q3: How many people are in your household? [16 skipped]





SHARE TYPE AND USAGE

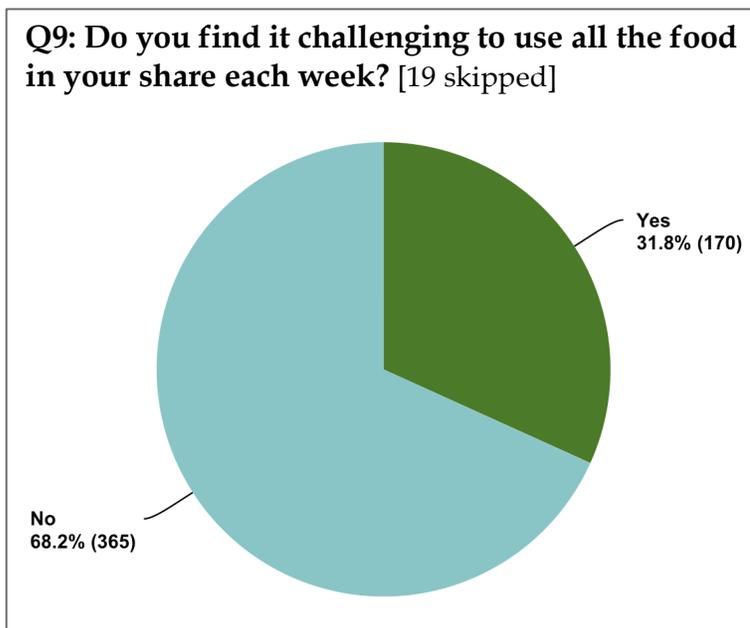
Households are offered flexible options to accommodate the quantity of produce they require and on what basis. Share types vary by farm and are classified as full/large, half/medium, quarter/small, week-to-week/opt-in, or other (i.e., monthly). **Nearly half of all repondents (44.5%) subscribed to half/medium shares, closely followed by full/large shares at 31.1%.**



Respondents were asked their opinion on the quantity of food in their share. **Most people (68.2%) found they were not throwing food away.** Those who did find it challenging to make use of all of the food provided offered various reasons.

Common themes included:

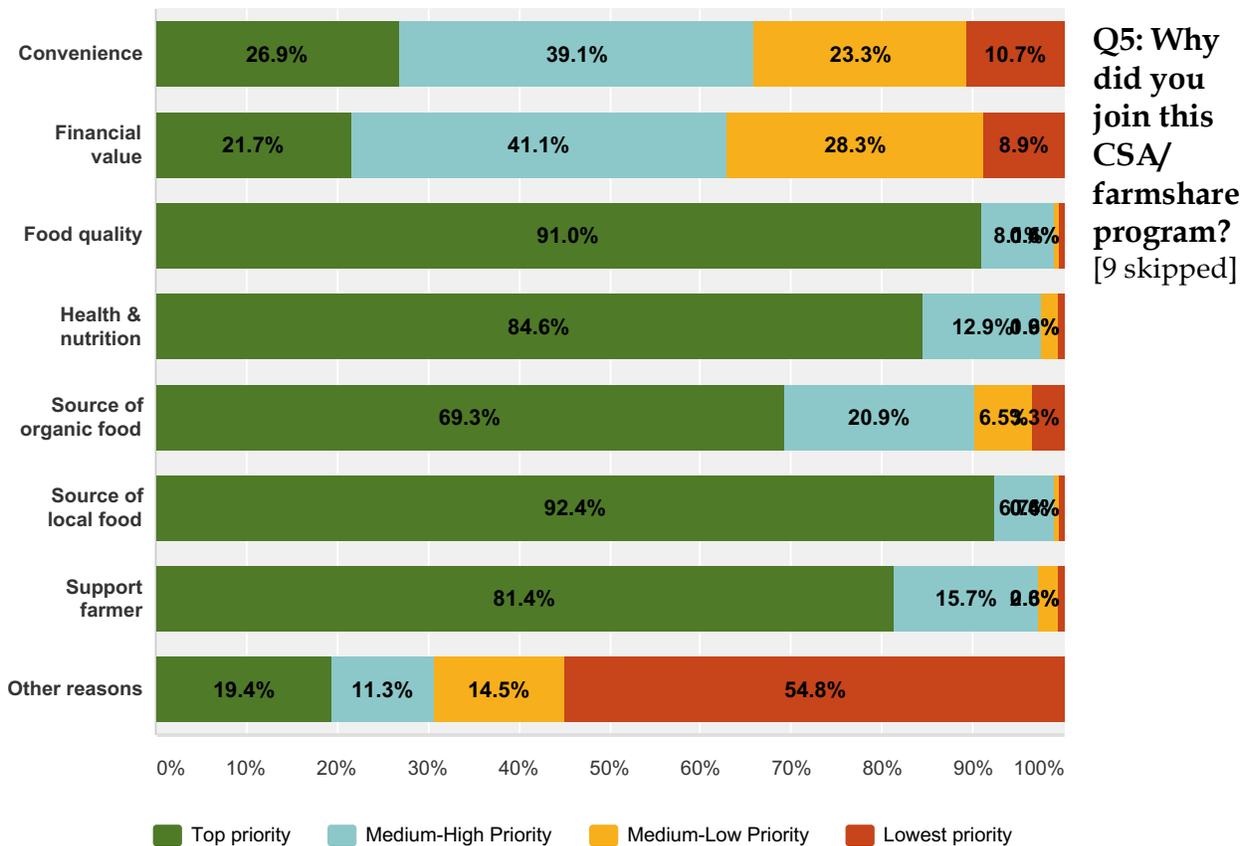
- **Too much perishable food** for their household to consume while still fresh (particularly with greens).
- **Issues with storage**, such as insufficient space, lack of knowledge, or spoilage.
- **Unfamiliarity with the vegetables** given and how to prepare them.
- **Busy schedules** or seasonal travels that affected meal planning.
- **“Picky eaters”** in the family.





REASONS FOR JOINING

The main motivation for buying into a CSA/farmshare program is having access to high quality food that contributes to health and nutrition while supporting farmers and the local economy.



When asked to prioritize reasons for joining, “source of local food,” “food quality,” and “health & nutrition” outranked “convenience” and “financial value” as top priorities for most, although these two factors remain highly important for members.

Healthy families and strong communities are clearly motivating values as well. Other reasons noted include:

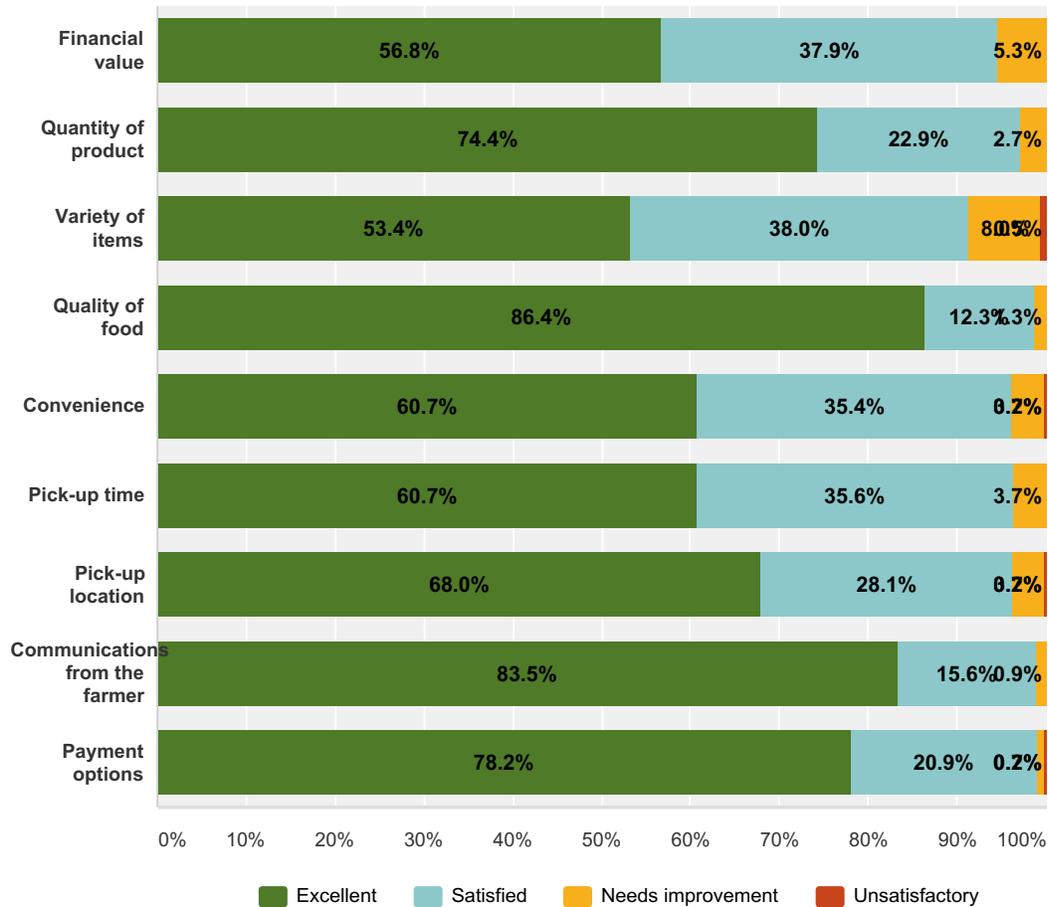
- variety, diversity, and selection
- trying new foods they wouldn’t buy or find at the grocery store
- environmental sustainability
- eating seasonally
- building community and reinvesting in the local economy

We have a young child and it’s my wish/need that she knows farmers.



MEMBER SATISFACTION

Respondents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction on nine core criteria of their experience. Overall, members were satisfied with all elements, with the majority citing “excellent” to describe their level of fulfillment.



Q6: What was your level of satisfaction with your CSA/ farmshare for 2014?
[7 skipped]

Notably, 86.4% of members were especially satisfied with the quality of food being produced by their farmers and 83.5% with the communications received directly from the farm.

I wish I could choose what I do not want and replace those with things I do want. I would like to be able to purchase extra vegetables, whatever is available, when I do my pick up.

Based on comments, it is clear that **forming a connection with their local farmers is important to members**, whether through websites, email updates, newsletters, or simply meeting the farmers at pick-up each week. Recipes were noted as a nice touch, especially for uncommon vegetables.



Very satisfied with farm's creativity and flexibility - especially to do with changes, substitutions, and special orders or additions. This farm tried very hard to please!

The fact that we could join the program at any time was very much appreciated, otherwise we would not have been able to participate. The fact that we could chose the vegetables we wanted, and mix and match the 'weighed' items was also very much appreciated.

Flexibility and variety are also critical to satisfaction: **being given the opportunity to trade or swap items in order to create their ideal selection adds value**, and members who felt variety was lacking indicated that as a point of dissatisfaction.

Because quality carries great importance to members, in rare cases the lack thereof was a deterrent for renewing their subscriptions. As one respondent explained, **“...as an investor, I expected to be supplied with the best produce. I know there is better produce produced on the farm because I see it for sale in markets.”**

FEEDBACK ON ITEM SELECTION

The survey asked members whether there were items in their share that they would like to see more of or less of, with the option to list up to three items. Of course, responses varied widely by farm based on their individual offerings and selection - with many vegetables appearing in both categories depending on preference - but a few trends appeared with common items listed in the following chart.

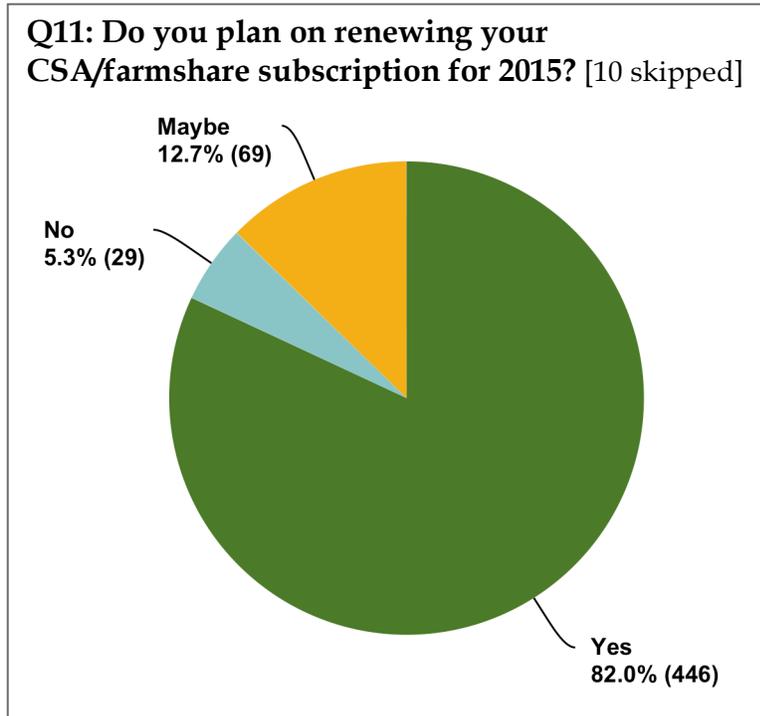
In general, members crave diversity and balance on a weekly basis and throughout the season: between greens and root crops as well as between traditional and more unusual and exotic items. There were numerous requests for larger quantities of basic/staple vegetables. Others requested the option for preserves/pickles or frozen product during the off-season.

MORE OF THESE... (313 answered)	LESS OF THESE... (205 answered)
Beans (e.g., yellow, green)	Beets
Berries (mix)	Cabbage
Brussels sprouts	Eggplant
Fruit (mix)	Fennel
Garlic	Kale
Greens/Salad Mix (variety)	Lettuce/greens
Herbs (fresh)	Potatoes
Onions	Turnip
Potatoes	
Root/cellaring vegetables	
Squash (winter)	
Tomatoes (e.g., heirloom, cherry)	



RETENTION RATE

When asked if they plan to renew their subscription for 2015, an overwhelming 82% of respondents (446 members) indicated “yes.”



The 5.3% of respondents that will not be renewing (5.3%) cited reasons including: plans for their own garden production; a lack of compatibility with their cooking style; inconvenient pick-up times/locations; poor variety; affordability; or that they will (unfortunately) be moving out of the farm’s vicinity. In a few cases, members determined that shopping at the farmers’ market would be more economical and suited to their household.

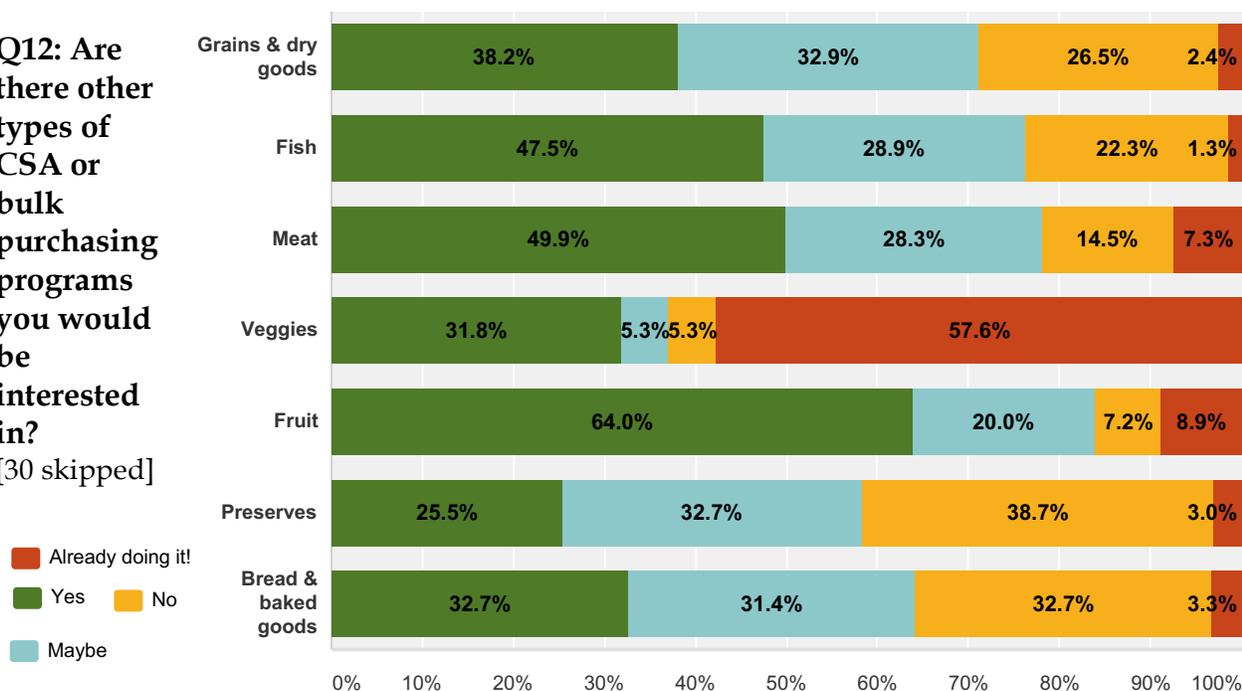
The remaining 12.7% of responses were “maybe,” commonly due to possible relocation, plans to grow their own food, financial constraints. In many cases these members indicated they would either seek out a new farm in their new community or divide their share amongst a larger group or friends/family.

OTHER PRODUCTS OF INTEREST

Members were asked if there were other products they would be interested in receiving as part of a CSA or bulk purchasing program. While vegetables cover the majority of existing shares, **over half of respondents were interested in receiving fruit** – something only 8.9% of members are already provided. **Meat and fish** are also of relatively high interest to members, whereas preserves, bread and baked goods are slightly less so.



Q12: Are there other types of CSA or bulk purchasing programs you would be interested in?
[30 skipped]



THE BEST FOR LAST

Respondents were given the opportunity to share their favourite part of participating in a CSA/farmshare program. 388 members offered insights into their experiences. **Responses largely reflected respondents' desires for high quality, locally sourced, nutritious food that supports their local farmers, communities, and economies.** These values are evidently widespread among CSA/farmshare members in the Atlantic region.

Nutrition, diversity, and connection to food. A common affirmation was the introduction of new or unusual foods into members' diets, and the encouragement to increase their consumption of

Although the vast majority of comments were positive feedback, suggestions were also made to increase variety, improve flexibility for pick-up, and provide more options for swapping items. Exchange boxes were noted as a positive way to reduce waste and enhance satisfaction. Furthermore, A few comments on quality suggested implementing better quality control (particularly for fruit) and packaging to improve shelf-life.

Affordability was mentioned as well, with one member noting the inaccessibility of CSA costs for less affluent community members, stating: *"Addressing this kind of social injustice is really the next frontier for the local/slow-food movement: how to do it so it's not just the privilege of the rich? I wouldn't want to suggest our CSA come up with an answer all on its own, but it would be a gesture of goodwill if it were to make some sort of public acknowledgement of the issue."*



healthy vegetables through creative recipes. CSA members seem to be adventurous and excited to encourage “picky” family members to try new things.

I never thought I would hear a 9 year old say something like "yes! Brussel Sprouts with squash sauce!" at the sight of brassicas in his plate. They know where their food comes from and they really feel like they are a part of it even though the farmers are the ones that grow the food.

For young families, the importance of teaching children about the food system and creating a connection to their food was mentioned frequently. To assist with this process, it was suggested that farms post the contents of the share in advance to help households with weekly meal planning.

It was fun to see the variety of veggies each week and even though we got weekly newsletters to tell us what we were getting in our share, we were excited to see the freshness and colour of everything on the table.

Many members noted that their membership enabled convenient access to fresh, organic, local produce and encouraged them to plan meals in advance and learn to preserve food as well.

Building Community. Friendly interactions with farmers and becoming part of a community are important for many. Having the chance to visit the farm firsthand was a bonus, and others welcome more opportunities for food literacy within their communities. For example, one member suggested ACORN produce a weekly radio farm report.

We LOVED our farmers. Amazing communication, amazing value and delicious food.