

# CSA MEMBER SURVEYS: SUMMARY REPORT 2013

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## ABOUT THESE ANNUAL SURVEYS

Consumers are becoming increasingly concerned with where their food is coming from and how their food is grown. As a result, transparent and local food production systems are being sought to mitigate these concerns. The Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model, which is a common direct marketing strategy, is a key lens to evaluate the success of these initiatives.

From 2010-2013, farms operating CSAs in Atlantic Canada were asked to participate in ACORN's annual CSA/farmshare member survey. Members of CSAs were sent a short confidential survey, providing constructive feedback on their experience with the CSA/farmshare program. This survey has acted as an important feedback tool, helping us 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 past years, we've received close to 500 responses, so that's a lot of information!) Last year we compiled a 3-year trend report (2010-2012) of the overall feedback of CSA members in the Atlantic provinces. These results can be viewed [here](#).

In this report, we provide summary data for all CSA member responses in 2013. Therefore, if interested, current CSA farmers who participated in this year's survey can compare their results to the overall percentages. Furthermore, this information can also be used to track the progress of CSAs in Atlantic Canada as compared to previous years ([CSA 3-year trend report](#)).

Thank you to the farms and CSA members for their participation!

# CSA/farmshares in Atlantic Canada

## MEMBER PROFILES

**In 2013**, 550 surveys were submitted with 244 finished to completion (i.e. every question answered). The response rate was between 44% and 99% per question.

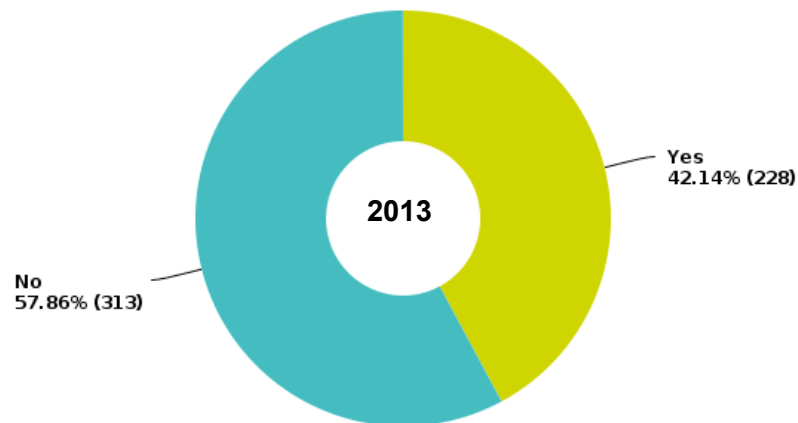
The percentage of members that previously held a CSA subscription (57.86%) was slightly more than those currently in their first year of subscription (42.14%).

We also included a question about the household size. Answers ranged from 1-8 people with an average household of 2.91, so approximately 3 individuals.



**Is this your first year belonging to a CSA/farmshare (Q. 2)**

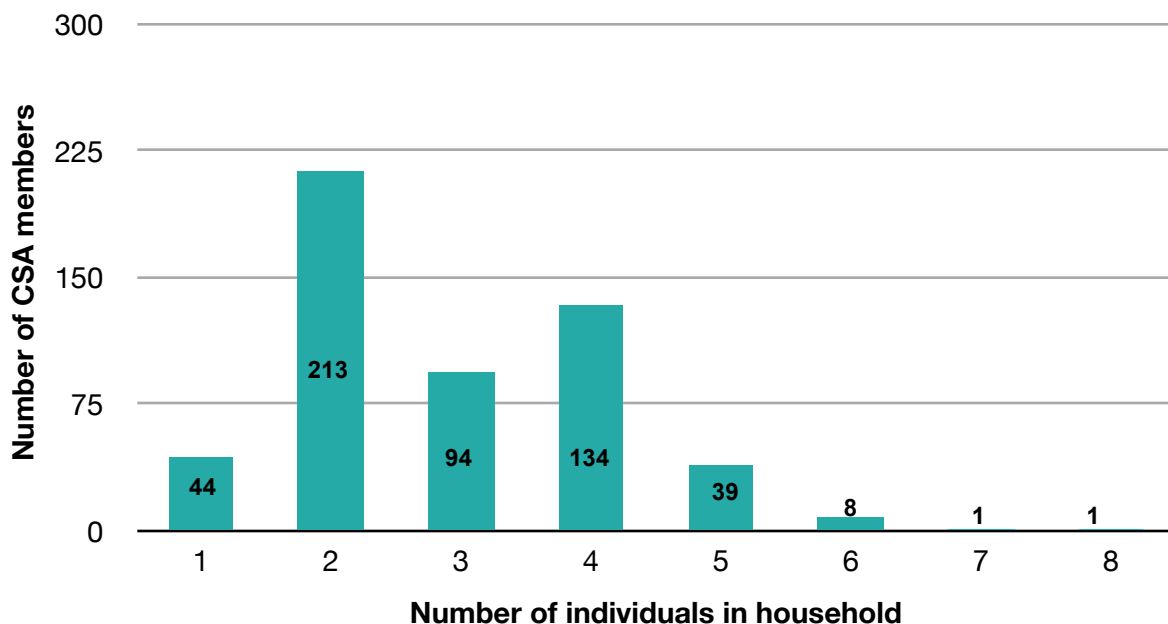
**2013 -- ANSWERED: 541; SKIPPED: 9**



**How many people are in your household? (Q. 3)**

**2013 -- ANSWERED: 534; SKIPPED: 16**

**CSA member household size in 2013**

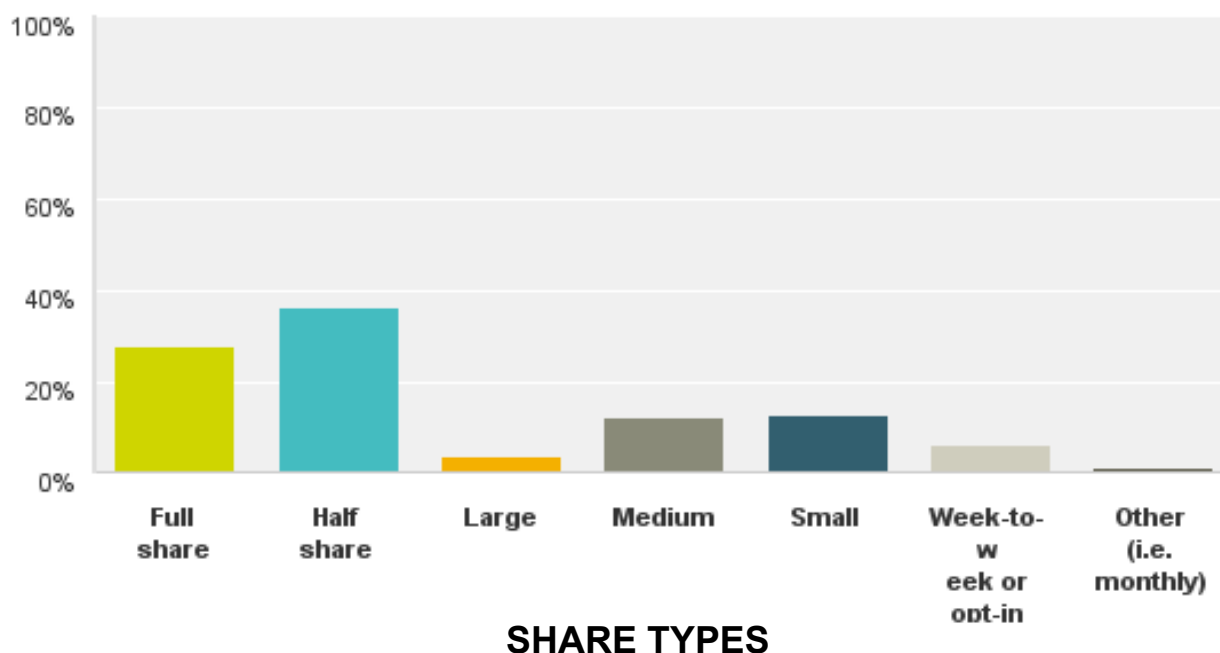


# CSA/farmshares in Atlantic Canada

## Share types

Typical share choices for members were week-to-week/optional buy-in (some members indicated that this allowed them to join and supplement vegetables from their own gardens), half (the most popular choice in all three years) and full share.

**What kind of share do you have? (Q. 4)**  
**2013 -- ANSWERED: 537; SKIPPED: 13**



## Share quantity: “Too much”, “just enough” or “too little” food

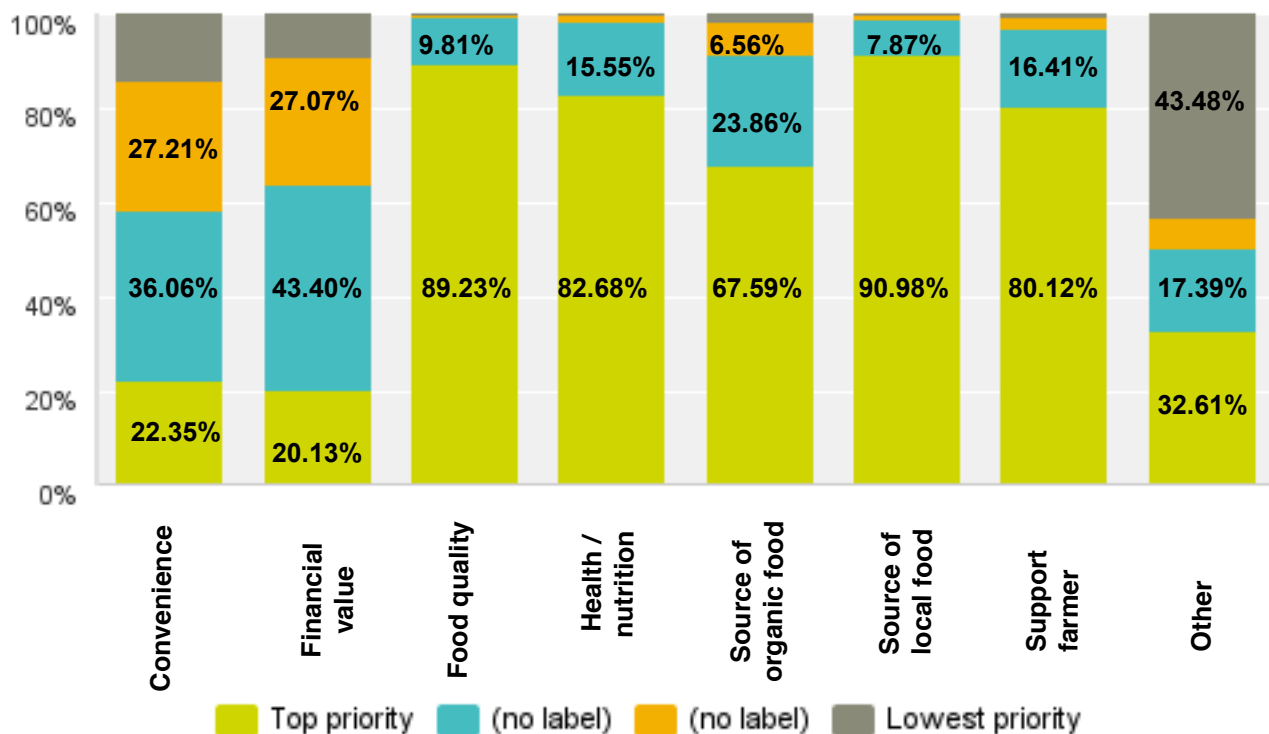
**Do you find it challenging to use all the food in your share each week? Are you throwing food away?(Q. 9)**  
**2013 -- ANSWERED: 401; SKIPPED: 149**

Many members were satisfied by the amount of food they received. Few complained about there being “too little” food. Depending on diet (for instance, whether the member(s) were vegetarian) and how many were in a household, the potential for wasting food varied.

Most members indicated that they were able to use most of their produce, if not all, and some donated left-over produce to others. Some members indicated personal reasons as to why they didn’t use all of their share each week (i.e. poor meal planning, new to cooking, not accustomed to eating so many vegetables, etc.)

# Reasons for joining a CSA

Why did you join this CSA/farmshare program?  
2013 -- ANSWERED: 591; SKIPPED: 9



CSA members are primarily concerned with having access to quality food (fresh produce with high nutritional value) that is locally grown.

Members surveyed in 2013 were asked to rank their reasons for joining the CSA (on a scale from 1 to 4, 1 being the top priority and 4 being the lowest). Top priority reasons for joining the CSA were to have access to a “source of local food”, the “food quality” and nutritional value, to “support farmers” and to have a “source of organic food”.

“I see it as a local economic development and food security contribution.”

Members specified other reasons, including the common responses of: local economic development, a good way to try new vegetables, and to lower negative impacts on the environment.

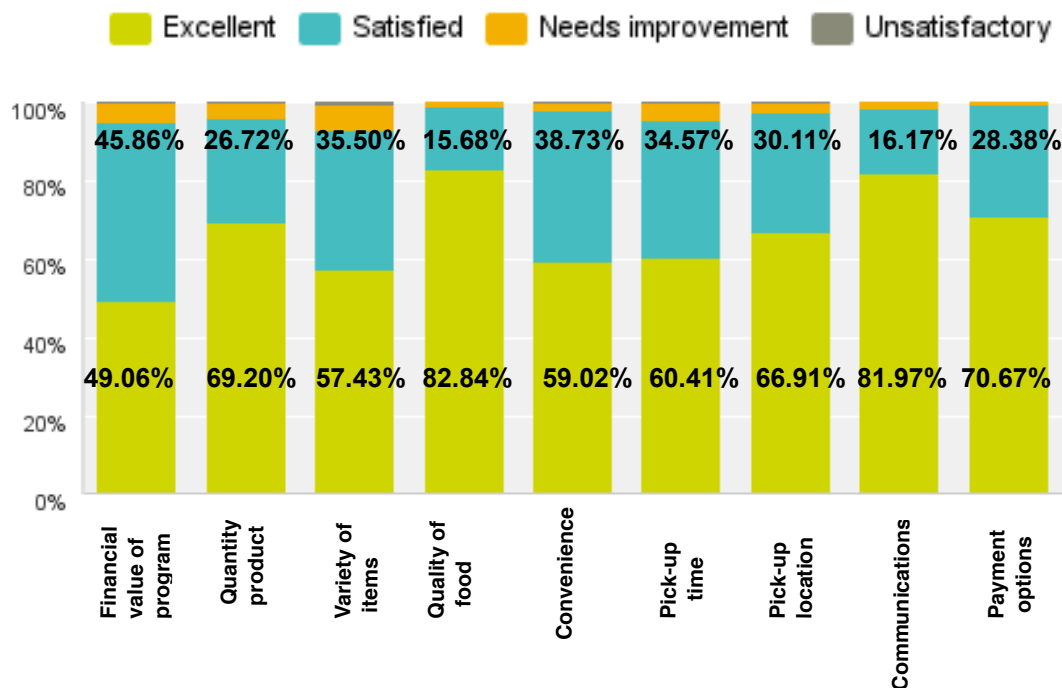
“**Diversity:** some veggies I have received I would have never bought on my own from the grocery store. :)”

# CSA/farmshare member satisfaction

Overall members surveyed rated satisfaction as high in 2013. The majority chose the options “excellent” or “satisfied” on all elements of their CSA experience; close to a 100% of members ranked satisfaction as “excellent” or “satisfied”.

## What is your level of satisfaction with your CSA/ Farmshare? (Q. 6)

2013 -- ANSWERED: 542; SKIPPED: 8



Quality of food was very important, as revealed in the comments given by CSA members. If quality was lacking, members highlighted this as a source of dissatisfaction. They appreciated the extra efforts from operators to ensure good communication. Members also appreciated a variety of vegetables.

**“My favourite part of participating in a CSA...** Supporting local farms and building relationships with farmers and larger community. Learning about new foods and recipes. My cooking skills have flourished since joining a CSA! :) Getting the kids to love veggies at an early age.”

# Retention rate



In the 2013 survey, members were asked if they planned on renewing their CSA/farmshare subscription for the following year. Retention rate, based on the consumer responses, was very high: 81.84% said yes, 13.04% said no and 5.03% chose maybe.

If customers chose “maybe”, reasons for not renewing ranged from moving out of the area the CSA currently served, financial reasons, and the interest in growing their own food.

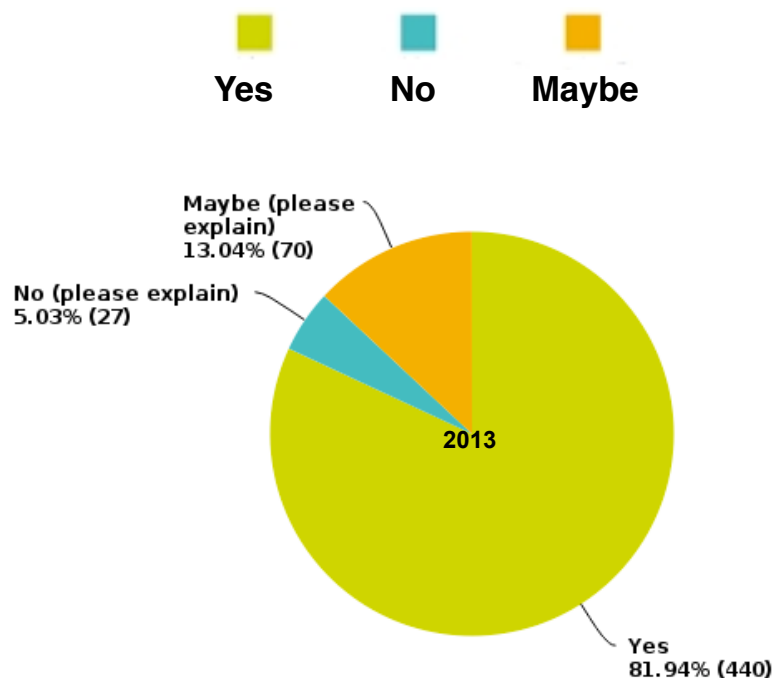
Overall, the retention rate is an indicator of high quality/successful CSAs currently in operation, as more members are returning.

As the Atlantic region moves forward in its CSA operations, it is helpful to keep in mind some key characteristics of successful CSAs currently in operation:

- 1) Consistency - in pricing and number of food items per week
- 2) Quality - in food value and customer service
- 3) Direct and helpful communication - at delivery time, through blog posts/newsletters, emails, etc.
- 4) Farmer to member connections - developing a rapport with members and creating a communal experience.
- 5) Member education - an essential element to ensuring that retention rate remains high. CSA operators will take the time to discuss the CSA model with members and teach techniques/offer recipes on how to use certain produce.

**Adapted from a presentation by Tarrah Young of Green Being Farm (Farm Management Canada).**

**Do you plan on renewing your CSA/Farmshare subscription for 2014? (Q. 11)**  
**2013 -- ANSWERED: 537; SKIPPED: 13**



## Member interest in other products

When asked in 2013 if members were interested in other types of CSAs/bulk purchasing, a high proportion indicated “yes” or “maybe” to meat and fruit. Members were also interested in fish, grains/dry goods, and baked goods – with preserves being the option of least interest. And, of course, most CSA members were already receiving vegetables.

**Are there other types of CSA or bulk purchasing programs you would be interested in? (Q. 12)**  
**2013 -- ANSWERED: 513; SKIPPED: 37**

