

PRELIMINARY REPORT: CURRENT AND FORMER CSA MEMBERS IN CALIFORNIA

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In 2014, a research team from UC Davis sent a survey to CSA operators to share with their current and former members. The data below are from 1,100 current CSA members and 354 former CSA members. Instead of being broadly representative, we received no to very low responses from members of most of the CSAs in the state. This means that the vast majority of member responses in this report came from only 9 CSAs. We are in the process of trying to increase participation by sharing this preliminary report with CSA farmers/operators.

In general, members have seen important changes in their lives since joining a CSA. More than half of current CSA members that responded to the survey indicated that CSA membership has: increased their vegetable consumption (87.8%), improved their overall diet (79.6%), encouraged them to spend more time cooking or preparing food (70.7%), led them to develop a greater awareness of agriculture and environmental issues (64.5%), and reduced their time spent shopping for food (57.1%).

WILLINGNESS TO PAY MORE

We asked members how much they were currently paying for their CSA share and how much they thought their CSA share was worth. Forty-five percent of current members felt they were paying the right amount, 44% felt they were not paying enough, and 11% felt they were paying too much. When we asked current members if they were willing to pay more to provide a fairer salary to the farmer, we got a very different response. More than 68% of members said they would be willing to pay more than the current box price in order to provide a fairer salary for the farmer, while 20% felt they were still paying the right amount and fewer than 1% said they were paying too much. We look forward to more member responses so that we can calculate these and related figures for individual CSAs.

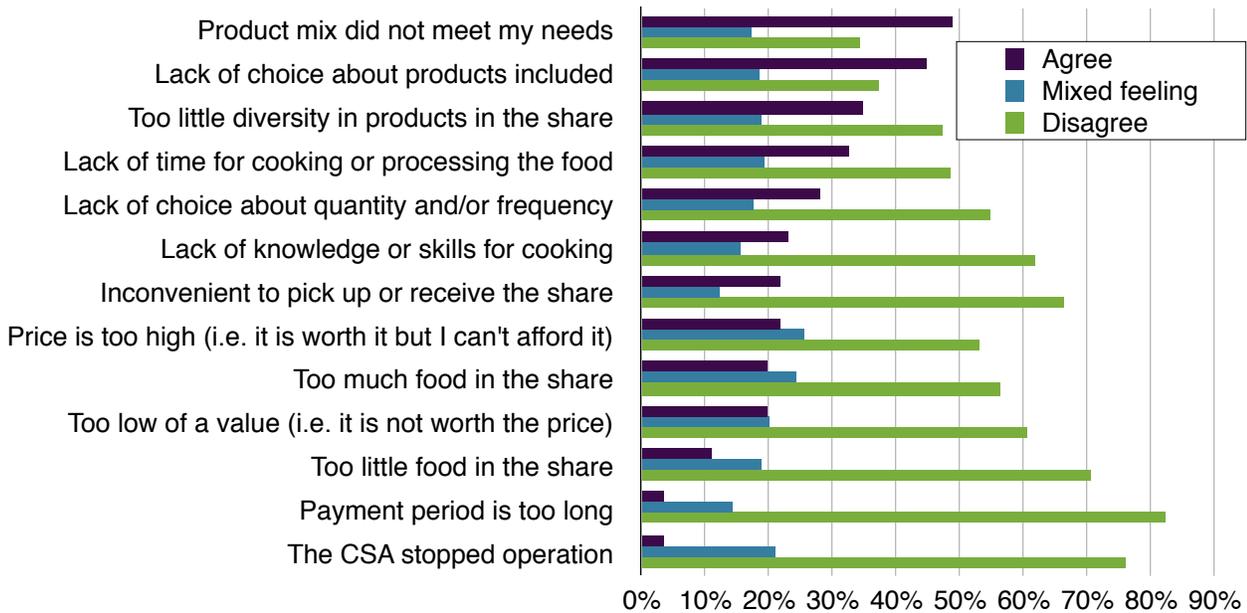
REASONS FOR MEMBER DISCONTINUATION

Former members discontinue membership for two main reasons: 1) they are dissatisfied with their CSA experience in some way, or 2) they experience life circumstances and/or life events that make membership more difficult or impossible, or reduce its benefits to the household. We explored many of these reasons by providing former members with a list of 13 reasons why they discontinued the CSA. For each reason, we asked whether they agreed or disagreed (Figure 1). It is important to note that 20% of respondents did not agree with any of the reasons for leaving; gauging from their open-ended responses, this 20% of former members left for reasons other than their experience with the CSA (such as moving, changing jobs, etc.). As for the specific reasons for leaving, Figure 1 shows the *most* common reasons were “Product mix did not meet my needs” (49%) and “Lack of choice about products included” (44%). The *least* common reasons, other than the CSA stopping operation, were “Too little food in the share” (11%) and “Payment period is too long” (3%) (Figure 1).

Future analysis will be made possible when we have more survey responses from more CSAs. We plan to examine how former members’ reasons for discontinuation differ from CSA to CSA, which we will also relate to various farm-level variables, including farmers’ reporting of member retention rates, payment periods, share characteristics, drop-off type, etc.

Former members were asked if they would join a CSA again; 74% said “yes,” 3% said “no,” and 23% were unsure. Again, how much this varies between CSAs is an important future question.

Figure 1. Former CSA members' reasons for discontinuing membership

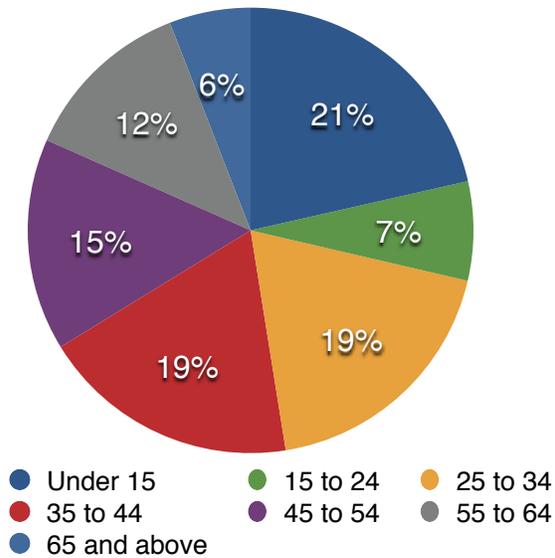


HOUSEHOLD AND MEMBER CHARACTERISTICS

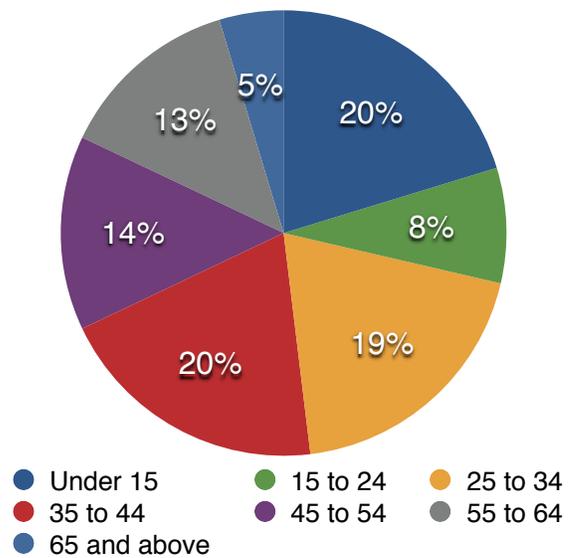
Current and former CSA members share a number of household and member characteristics. The households have a similar number of members (2.64 and 2.58, respectively) and average age (38.6 and 38.8, respectively). They also have very similar household compositions by age (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Household composition by age bracket

Current members' household composition



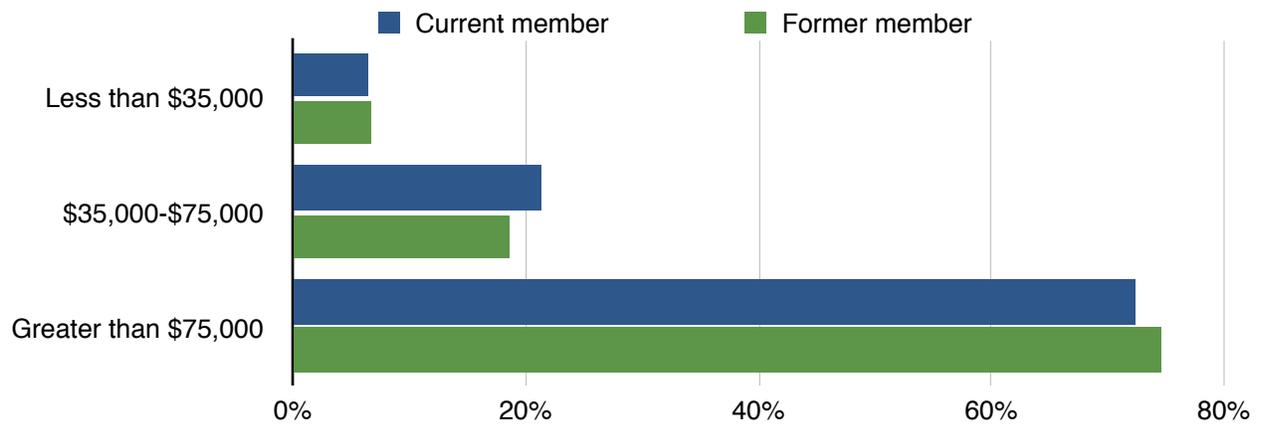
Former members' household composition



CSA member households, both current and former, have higher-than-average incomes and high levels of formal education. Ninety-seven percent of current and former households have at least one full time wage earner, and 42% of current members have two full-time earners compared to 53% for former members.

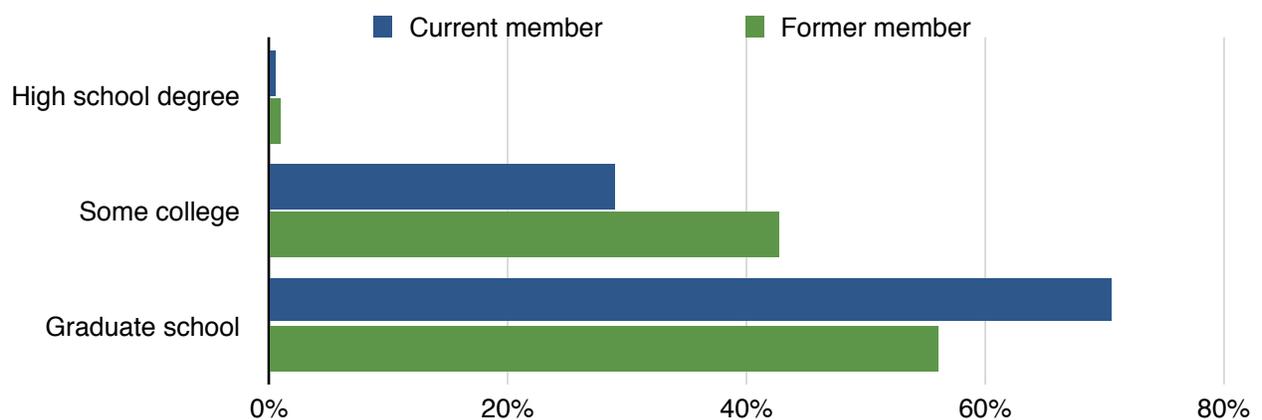
The two groups have very similar breakdowns regarding household annual gross income. For both populations' annual incomes, slightly more than 6% make less than \$35,000, about 20% make between \$35,000 and \$75,000, and over 72% make over \$75,000 (Figure 3). For comparison, the median annual income for California households was \$61,400.¹

Figure 3. Percentage of households by gross (pre-tax) annual income



CSA members are also more formally educated compared to the average California household. While 61 percent of California households have some college education or more,¹ almost 99 percent of CSA members (current and former) attended some college or more (Figure 4). Current members had substantially more graduate school experience.

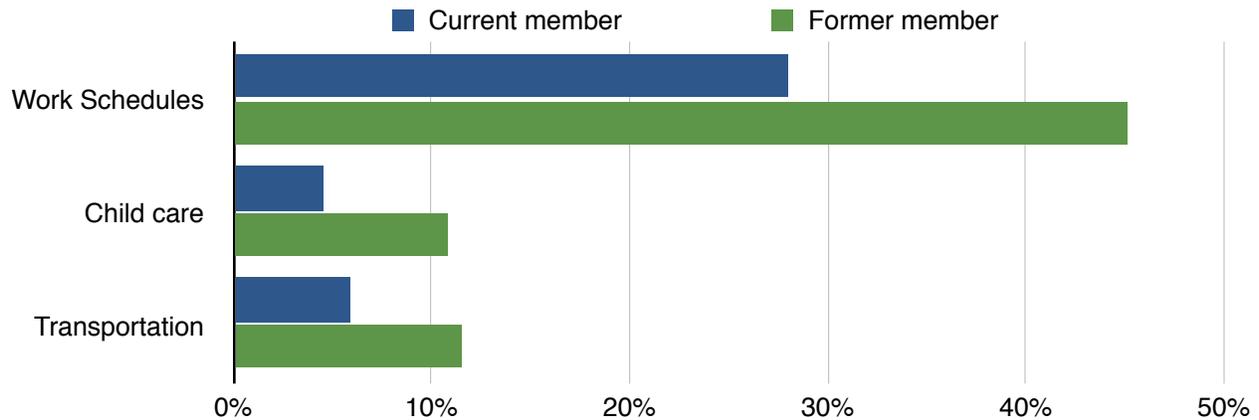
Figure 4. Percentage of households by highest level of educational attainment



¹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2013). American FactFinder: California. Retrieved November 15, 2014 from <http://factfinder2.census.gov/>.

Greater differences existed between current and former members in terms of life circumstances and/or major life events. We asked both current and former members, “Have any of the following ever interfered with your household’s CSA participation: work schedules, child care issues, and/or lack of transportation.” Former members were much more likely to experience household situations that interfered directly with their ability to participate in the CSA (Figure 5).

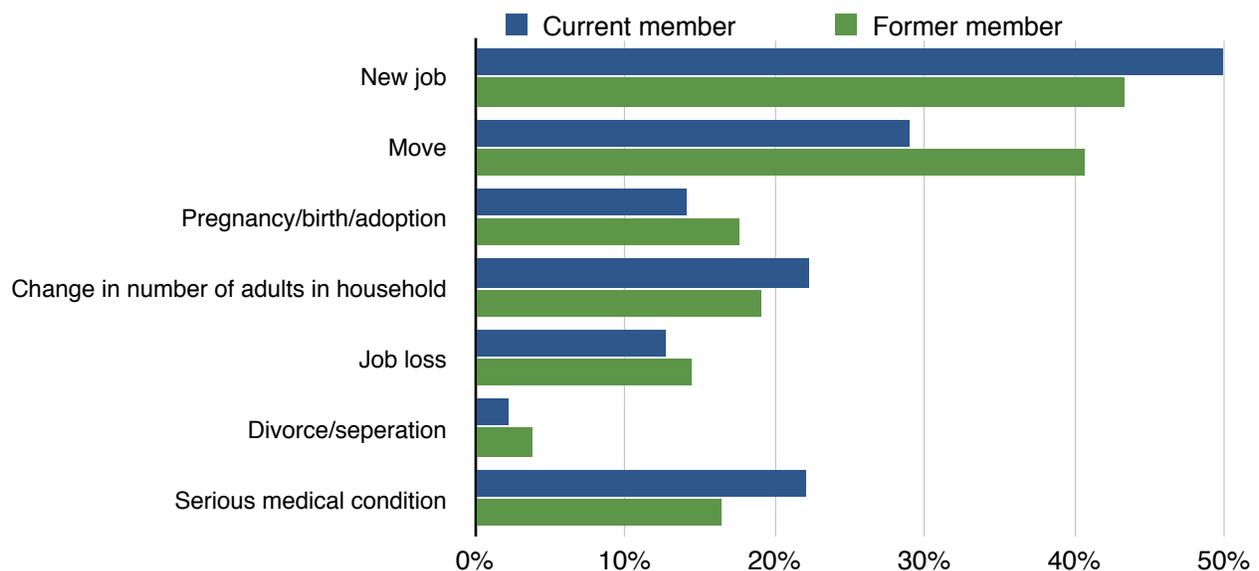
Figure 5. Percentage of households experiencing interference with CSA participation



Current and former members also differed in their experience of some major changes in their household that potentially affected membership. Former member households were more likely to have experienced the following: a move; job loss; divorce or separation; or pregnancy, adoption, and/or birth. This suggests that these events might have a disruptive impact on continued membership (Figure 6).

On the other hand, current member households were more likely to have experienced the following: a new job, a change in the number of adults in the household, or a serious medical condition (Figure 6). These three life changes may be reasons for joining or staying with a CSA, but further research is needed to see how these life events relate to continued membership.

Figure 6. Percentage of households experiencing a major life change



IMPORTANCE OF, AND SATISFACTION WITH, CSA CHARACTERISTICS

In our survey, we listed 13 different characteristics of members' CSA experience, as shown in the first column of Table 1, and asked current and former members to select whether each characteristic was 1) important *and* essential for continuing membership, 2) important *but not* essential for continuing membership, 3) of minor importance, or 4) not important. We then asked the members to indicate their level of satisfaction with those 13 characteristics. We converted each of these sets of responses — importance and satisfaction — to a number using a scale of 1 to 5, in which the higher number represents greater importance and/or satisfaction.

Table 1. Gap analysis of member importance and satisfaction of CSA characteristics

	Current members			Former members		
	Importance	Satisfaction	Gap	Importance	Satisfaction	Gap
	A	B	B - A	A	B	B - A
high quality produce	4.91	4.76	-0.15	4.89	4.24	-0.65
the farm's agricultural practices (e.g., organic)	4.68	4.70	0.02	4.26	4.17	-0.09
convenient pickup/delivery location	4.48	4.63	0.15	4.33	3.99	-0.34
appropriate quantity of food	4.43	4.58	0.15	4.56	3.76	-0.80
appropriate diversity of products	4.37	4.30	-0.07	4.39	3.32	-1.07
health, dietary, and/or lifestyle impacts from membership	4.23	4.58	0.35	3.86	4.25	0.39
affordability	4.18	4.22	0.04	4.04	3.47	-0.57
short transportation distances for produce (i.e., fewer food miles)	4.07	4.39	0.32	3.58	4.07	0.49
ease of communication with CSA staff/farmer	3.96	4.47	0.51	3.27	3.88	0.61
ability to choose share items/content	2.78	3.75	0.97	3.72	2.98	-0.74
knowing my farmer personally	2.71	3.86	1.15	2.28	3.42	1.14
newsletter	2.63	4.16	1.53	2.24	3.60	1.36
sense of community in the CSA	2.6	3.85	1.25	2.15	3.36	1.21

In Table 1, a number of trends emerge. In general, current members placed more value on traditional CSA characteristics, like sustainable agricultural practices, lower transport distances, ease of communication, knowing the farmer, the newsletter, and sense of community. In contrast, former members placed more value on CSA characteristics that are more associated customization, like the right amount and type of products in the share, and ability to choose items in my share. As one former member explained,

I love the idea of fresh organic produce delivered to my home. What I would love most is if I could actually check off a shopping list of what it is I want. Many times I had no idea what the heck the items were (i.e. fennel!) and I ended up throwing a lot of the food away because it wasn't what we'd normally eat.

The gap analysis in Table 1 shows the difference between the average level of importance and the average level of satisfaction for current and former members. For characteristics with a negative number, shown in red in Table 1, members' satisfaction is lower than the level of importance. For example, for

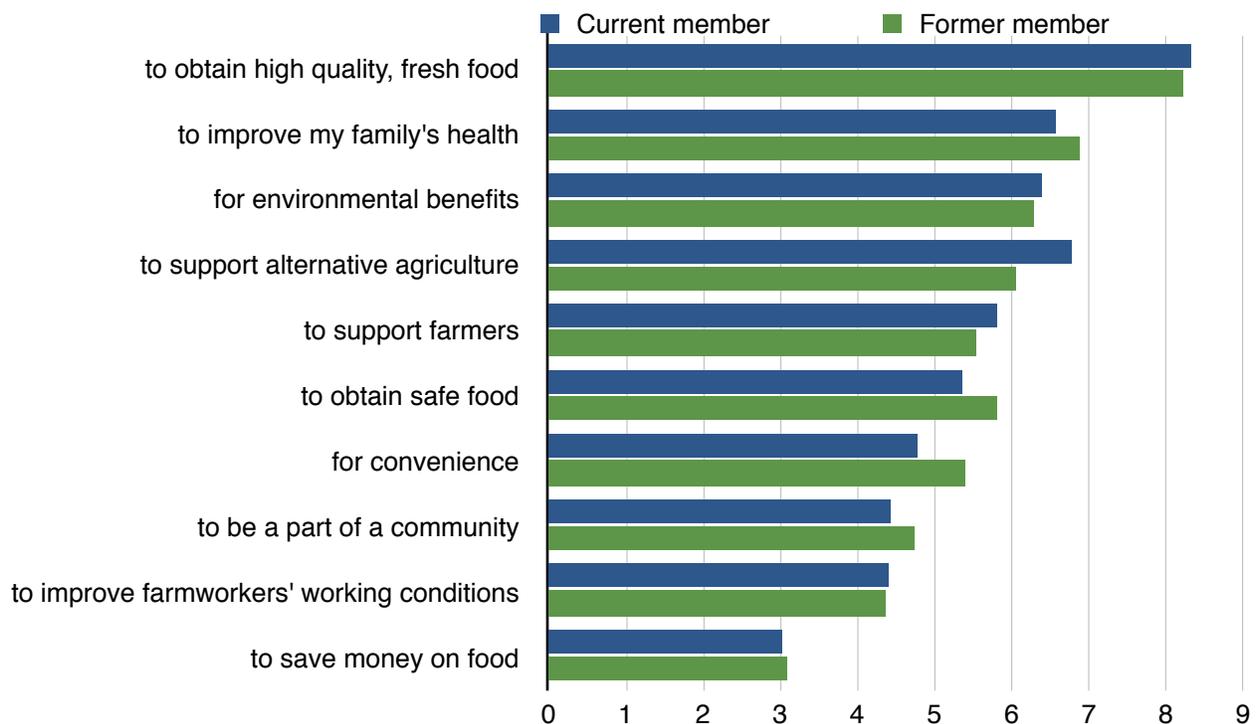
former members the average level of importance is 4.89 (out of 5), while their level of satisfaction is 4.24 (out of 5), which creates a negative difference of -0.65. The more saturated the color the greater the gap. For characteristics with a positive number, shown in green in Table 1, members' average satisfaction is greater than the average level of importance. For example, members were very satisfied with the newsletter but did not feel it was vitally important. The newsletter received an average importance value of 2.63 (of 5) and a level of satisfaction of 4.15, for a large positive difference (1.57) for current CSA members (Table 1). The gap analysis shows that, on average, current members are very satisfied with the majority of CSA characteristics and that none are particularly lacking. In contrast, former members' responses showed larger disconnects between importance and satisfaction for many more characteristics, especially related to diversity of products in the share, appropriate quantity of food in the share, and ability to choose share content (see also Figure 1). Both of these findings might, however, vary considerably by CSA.

JOINING A CSA

Motivations for joining a CSA were remarkably similar between current and former members (Figure 6). Most members, both current and former, indicated that their top motivation for joining a CSA was to obtain high quality, fresh food. Almost 75% of respondents put this as one of their top three reasons for joining a CSA (Figure 7). Members were also motivated for environmental reasons, including their interest in supporting alternative/organic agriculture (higher for current members), and for the environmental benefits more generally. Being part of a community and improving the conditions of farmworkers were among the least important reasons for both groups. Neither current nor former members were generally motivated by the desire to save money.

We asked current members how they found their CSA, with the questions allowing them to indicate multiple sources. Over 60% of current members found their CSA through word of mouth. The next two most important sources were online searches (22%) and farmers' market booths (22%).

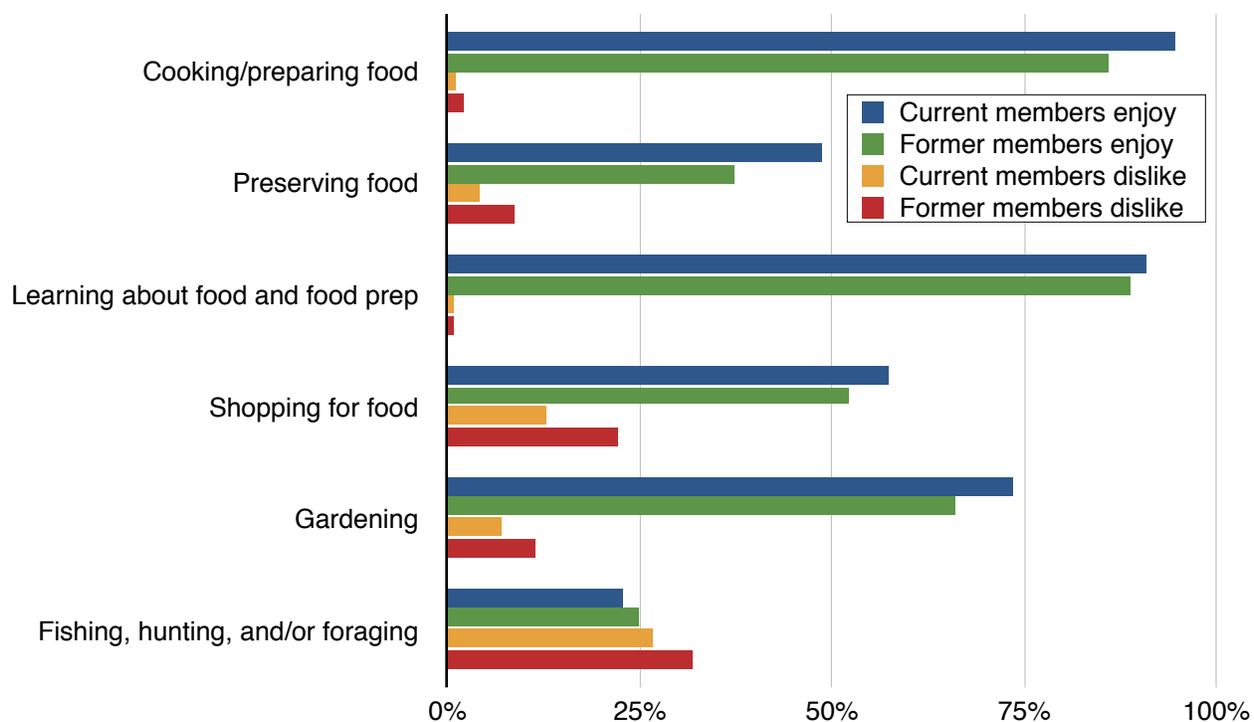
Figure 7. Average ranking of motivation for joining a CSA (each ranked from 1 to 10)



ENJOYMENT OF FOOD RELATED ACTIVITIES

The survey asked current and former members about their level of enjoyment of food-related activities like cooking, preserving, etc. Current members were more likely to enjoy almost all food-related activities (with the exception of fishing, hunting and/or foraging) than former members. In general, current members enjoy food related activities, with particular interest in cooking and learning about food and cooking (Figure 8). These data support what farmers shared in interviews about their members needing to enjoy cooking in order to remain members.

Figure 8. Interest in food related activities



CONCLUSION

Thank you again for taking the time to read this report. We hope that it has provided some insight into current and former CSA member individual and household characteristics, motivation for joining a CSA, ranking of importance and satisfaction with various characteristics of their CSA, experience of life events, and enjoyment of food related activities. While there are many similarities between current and former CSA members, there are also a number of significant differences that may shed light on the likelihood of members to maintain membership. Below is a summary of key findings from the study.

Current members

- Current members feel that CSA membership has: increased their vegetable consumption (87.8%), improved their overall diet (79.6%), inspired them to spend more time cooking or preparing food (70.7%), led them to develop a greater awareness of agriculture and environmental issues (64.5%), and reduced time spent shopping for food (57.1%).
- Current members are willing to pay more for their share if the additional amount would help provide a fairer salary for the farmer.

Former members

- Former members discontinue for two main reasons: 1) they are dissatisfied with their CSA experience in some way, or 2) they experience circumstances and/or events that make membership more difficult or impossible, or reduce its benefits to the household.
- Seventy-four percent of former members said they would be interested in joining a CSA again, 3% said they were not interested, and 23% were unsure.

Similarities between current and former members

- Current and former members are on average older, wealthier, and more formally educated than the average Californian.
- Current and former members have similar household size and composition.
- Current and former members shared similar motivations for joining a CSA. For both their top motivation for joining a CSA was to obtain high quality, fresh food.

Differences between current and former members

- Former members are more likely to experience a major life event and day-to-day interference with their CSA.
- There was a larger gap between former members' ranking of level of importance and satisfaction with various aspects of their CSA.
- Current members were more likely to rank traditional CSA characteristics as important to their CSA membership as compared to former members.
- Former members were more likely to rank convenience and customization as important to their CSA membership as compared to current members.
- Current members were more likely to enjoy almost all food-related activities (with the exception of fishing, hunting and/or foraging) than former members.

While we are very excited about these initial findings, we know that we can do much more with the information if we had a more robust sample. We are striving for 5,000 current member responses (thus far we have 1,100), which will make this the largest CSA member survey ever conducted. With this information, we will be able to more accurately describe the relationship between CSA operation characteristics and member satisfaction and retention. We will also have a much better understanding of Californians that are likely to join and remain loyal to a CSA.

For each CSA operation with a substantial membership survey response, we will provide an individualized report, shared only with the farmer/operator. Individualized reports will compare your member responses to the aggregated responses of the statewide survey. This report will also include an assessment of members' willingness to pay more for their share as was shown at the aggregate level on page 1.

Thanks again!