SHARING THE RISK:
RISK COMMUNICATION IN COMMUNITY-SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE

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Before we start:

• Thank you to Mayhah Suri

• Much of this is based on her work

• She put majority of presentation together
  • She would be giving it but is in Thailand currently
Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA)

- CSA model inverts traditional agricultural economic model

- Members pledge support to a farm via shares which cover operational costs and receive periodic shares of the farm’s products.

- Model spreads the risk between farmers and members.
  - Consumers are protected from risk factors due to scale and government policies in conventional ag.

- Members are just as vulnerable as the farmers; if crops fail, members may not see a return on their investment.
Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA)

- Potential problems with model:
  - Only as good as contract written
  - Supermarket mentality
Introduction

• Maryland Department of Agriculture survey

• Risk communication issue
  • Farmers talk about it, members never heard it
Introduction

• Worked with MDA to develop outreach program focused on CSA “contracts”

• Develop outreach and educational resources to explain risks to owners and members
Resources

• Created model contract

• Accompanying guide explaining the elements of a good contract and why having one is important

• Resources available at http://go.umd.edu/CSAPage
Programming

- Hosted 2 free half-day workshops

- Topics covered:
  - Bad CSA “contracts”
  - What makes for a good membership agreement?
  - Labor issues related to CSAs
  - Other risk management tools options
Programming

- Hosted 2 webinars at night covering same topics as workshops
- Recordings of webinars are available online
Additional Resources

- All handouts and materials from workshops available on website.

- Final report highlighting what was learned during the project is on website.
BIGGEST ISSUE WHEN DEVELOPING “CONTRACT”
“Too Much Legalese”
“Too Much Legalese”

- Had to develop a “contract” that did not sound like a contract

- Biggest issue we heard from operators, Extension faculty, and attorneys working with CSAs

Then as of this moment,
“Too Much Legalese”
Program Evaluation

- 75 percent of respondents did not use a written contract before attending
  - Half decided to develop one after attending
- 25 percent already used a written agreement
  - Half re-wrote or re-evaluated theirs after attending, including adding an indemnification section
- Those who re-did their agreements reported using all or part of the model contract
Program Evaluation

- 86% of respondents at least looked up the contract, even if they did not use it
- Most people described the contract as “clear,” “relevant,” and/or “easy to adopt” but some found it too long and too “legal-sounding”
- 100% of respondents said they had a better understanding of why contracts are important to a CSA operation
Comments

• “It was very helpful in understanding the risks and rewards of adopting an extended and detailed member contract with real legal protection.”

• “This workshop was necessary and timely for me as a new farmer with developing CSA program. A lot of questions were answered. Thank you.”

• “As an operation always looking to expand our membership, we are wary of anything that could potentially turn off a new customer. "Too much legalese" falls into that category.”
Activity – rewrite “bad” contract
Next Steps and Implementation

- Reach out to CSA farmers in your region
  - Might need to get creative to find contact information; check farmer’s markets, do online searches
- CSA farmers and members are usually pro-technology and communication
- Provide reasons why using a contract is a good idea
- Multimedia – meet people where they are
THANK YOU!
QUESTIONS?

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