**Introduction**

We are responding to this RDP consultation in the context of Community Supported Agriculture.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) has been defined in the UK as meaning ‘any food, fuel or fibre producing initiative where the community shares the responsibilities and rewards of production in a spirit of mutual trust and openness. Whether through ownership, investment, sharing the costs of production, or provision of labour.’ A [charter](http://www.soilassociation.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=41QuWtYBZj0%3D&tabid=2200) is being developed which sets out a common understanding of the guiding principles of CSA in the UK. For details of how these principles are being put in practice in Wales, read [this leaflet](http://www.organiccentrewales.org.uk/uploads/food_for_our_future_a5_leaflet.pdf).

The Wales Community Supported Agriculture Group was set up with support from the RDP Wales 2007 – 2013 (though ‘Tyfu Pobl’ and ‘Better Organic Business Links’ projects). It exists to enable CSA projects to support one another through sharing experience, knowledge, ideas and resources (produce, labour, equipment etc.). Its membership stands at approximately 40 and includes both producer and community CSA members, businesses and individuals with an interest in becoming involved in CSA and supporting organisations such as The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, Organic Centre Wales and the Soil Association.

In the UK there approximately 100 established projects and a similar number in development. In Wales, to our knowledge there are 8 established projects with two in development.

While the movement in its current form is small its potential to deliver a low carbon, sustainable, resilient and equitable food system is limited only by its size. The approach of CSA is entirely consistent with the both the broader and the more specific aims of the new RDP. This response details that contribution and makes the case for active support for CSA projects.

**General points**

Under the ‘vision for the RDP’ the objectives of the Plan are identified as:

* Increasing the productivity, diversity and efficiency of and forestry businesses, improving their competitiveness and resilience and reduce reliance on subsidies
* Promoting strong, sustainable rural economic growth
* Improving the environment

In CSA projects, producers are financially supported by their members through a fixed subscription (usually monthly), for which they receive a share of the produce. In doing so they share the risks inherent in food production, making businesses much more resilient. As well as securing income and addressing cash flow problems, the commitment of the membership gives producers the confidence to diversify and experiment and enables more income to be derived from their ‘market’ thus reducing reliance on subsidies. These are all key elements of promoting strong, sustainable rural economic growth. The environmental contribution of CSA is twofold: a)It is underpinned by organic and low input systems, as set out in the charter and b) by selling direct from the farm, the supply chain is short and low carbon.

**Human and social capital**

While the focus of this priority is ‘business transformation’, developing links within and between communities is just as important for growing human and social capital. We would like to see a Plan that puts strong emphasis on farmers actively working in wider communities, participating in schools and education, community growing groups and farms becoming community resources for a whole range of activities. CSA, which actively involves local communities (rural and urban) is a highly effective vehicle through which to achieve these things.

With regard to knowledge transfer and innovation, CSA projects are almost unique in that KT is not only between producers, but between producers and their local communities. One of the key benefits of being a community member is the acquisition of new skills and knowledge relating to food production. Membership also strengthens links with in communities by widening social circles.

As well as production relation issues, CSA’s have particular needs for example choosing the most suitable businesses model, working in partnership with communities (many projects are run by a core group that includes both community and producer members) and managing volunteers. We ask that provision for this type of support is available.

**Cross cutting themes**

We are pleased to see the cross cutting themes are being taken seriously in the new Plan. By their nature, CSA projects are very inclusive and provide opporunities for all sections of society to become involved. Fairnes and equality are written indelably into the CSA charter. Access to fresh healthy, quality food at fair prices in a social setting are key ways in which CSA can tackle poverty and social exclusion.

**Investment measures**

We welcome the proposals for support under this priority, in particular the emapsis on support and micro businesses, which represent most of the CSA projects in Wales. We suggest that in view of the benefits for communities (e.g. improved diets, increased understanding of food production, fresh air and exercise and stengthen community links), CSA projects should be prioritised and/or offered more favourable terms.

With respect to risk manangment, we refer you to our comments under ‘General points’.

**Area based payment**

No specific comments

**LEADER**

The leader approach has worked well under the previous RDP. However, our preception is that LEADER groups were quite limited under Axis 3&4 in what they could deliver to individual businesses, which meant that the expectations of the latter were not always met. A more intergated to funding streams in the new Plan should help to address that issue. We suggest that CSA projects, which by their very nature are grass roots and community based, should be well placed to take advantage of LEADER funder. LEADER can also help to develop strong relationships with Local Government, who are in a position to put in place policy that support CSAs (e.g. public procurement, priority access to council owned land, planning policies that faciltate the establishment of new projects).