

Dear Forest Gardeners,

You may have heard of **Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)**, where households or individuals purchase shares in farm produce direct from a grower in the winter, and then pick up their produce shares over the course of the following growing season. CSAs are popular for many reasons, including: ensuring the farmer's income; giving the farmer up-front capital when they need it most; ensuring the purchaser gets quality, locally-produced food; keeping dollars in the local economy; and the satisfaction of building a relationship with your producer.

Community Supported Education (CSE) is similar!

You have expressed interest in attending a Forest Garden Design Intensive, and you need money up-front in order to attend. That makes you similar to a grower needing to buy seed, fertilizer, and so on before the growing season begins. Rather than struggling to come up with the funds yourself, or asking for loans or donations, you could contract with friends, family, and your community to pre-purchase a service that you provide later, just like when consumers buy a CSA share and pick up their vegetables later. In this case, though, you would offer an educational event or forest garden design services that they would pay you for up-front, but the work or workshop would take place after the design training! And here is the bonus: *this training is specifically designed to give you direct practical experience designing forest gardens that you can use after the training is over!* So the training will directly help you meet the financial obligations you incur through your CSE!

Multiplying Course Impact

CSE is a great way to involve your transition, relocation, or permaculture group in what you learn during the Forest Garden Design Intensive. Because they have a vested interest in what is happening, they will be more attentive to what the course is all about and what you will learn. Because you have a commitment to returning specific benefits to your community after the course, you have a clearer focus on practical implementation and your next steps as a forest gardener. Everyone benefits!

Setting up a CSE opportunity

This CSE pack gives you general guidance on how to approach others. If parts of it are not clear, please contact us with questions. If parts seem not to apply to your situation, please also get in contact and have a chat about ways to vary the CSE model.

The Essence of the Idea

The basic idea is that you, the forest gardener, find subscribers to invest upfront, at a discount, in: 1) a forest gardening workshop or workshop(s) that you agree to produce following your participation in Edible Ecosystems Emerging, and/or 2) forest garden design, installation and/or maintenance/establishment services provided after the training.

By supporting your professional development, subscribers get a discount on your services and help bring valuable skills pertinent to these changing, unstable times into their communities. You use most of the money from the subscribers to pay your forest garden design intensive tuition and some to produce the event or perform the services (we propose you save about 20% for this purpose, but the amount you save depends entirely on your circumstances).

The commitment to do this workshop or work ensures you the opportunity to hone your skills and knowledge right after the course—and drive that knowledge deeper into your bodymind. If you offer a workshop, your subscribers will attend, as will others to whom you advertise your event after the course. Attendees who did not pre-subscribe would represent an additional income source for you. If you offer design or other services, you build your skills and learn by doing, and you will gain confidence and contacts to spread your work to others.

We recommend you plan to complete your services within no more than six months after the training. We expect that the fact that you are trying to get training will help you advertise and receive support for your services. If you are part of a CSA farm, you might start with members there who will have an easier time understanding what you are trying to do.

Making the Approach

In making an approach seeking CSE support, you are professional and prepared. People have confidence in you because they see you making a serious submission and that you intend to deliver on what you offer. We suggest the following steps in increase your likelihood of success:

Prepare a forest gardener resume:

Your resume should be a single page that includes ONLY information relevant to your role as a forest garden designer. Mention qualifications relevant to your CSE proposal, experience (paid, volunteer & at home), community group work/leadership and future aspirations. Include references, especially if they are well-known or well respected in the community. Photographs are OK, as long as they are relevant.

Identify the characteristics and priorities of the people you plan to approach:
Are you approaching individuals or groups or both? Are you making the same offering to each population? If not, have a slightly different resume and/or CSE package. What key values and priorities do your intended market hold? What is their ability to fund your work? Propose a package that allows them to recoup their investment or even make money from it.

Make a formal, business-like approach and EXPECT that they will say yes:
Although email is now the dominant form of communication in the business community, a hard copy letter still commands more respect and is often taken more seriously than an email. Write to your prospective clients. Include a short cover letter where you state clearly that you want them to contract with you for the delivery of certain services post-course, and attach a listing of each package and the related investment.

If you already have a good relationship with someone, you might not need to write to them. You could call, explain the concept, and set up a meeting. You already know that the package you are proposing is a good value, so expect that they will be interested and likely to say “yes.” Practice basic sales skills: don’t raise objections or obstacles unless they do, but be ready with an appropriate response if negatives come up. You are not ‘hard selling’ – you are offering a good deal which some people will be smart enough to grab. If they are not interested, thank them politely and ask if they know anyone who might like to be involved. (Don’t take rejection personally; there are many different reasons why folks might not be able to take your offer).

Resources

You have in your hands (or on your computer screen) a few documents that we hope will aid you in creating a Community Supported Educator program to help finance your participation in Edible Ecosystems Emerging. This innovative application of the Community Supported Agriculture concept excites us! We’ve worked to make it as clear and easy for you as possible.

In this packet we’ve included a one-page flyer describing the CSE concept to potential subscribers and a brochure about the Forest Garden Design Intensive course in case potential subscribers are curious about what they might fund. We suggest you fill in details about the services you will offer at the bottom of the attached flyer with the CSFG header. Feel free to revise, sample from what we’ve offered, or start from scratch and make your own package!

We also include some one-page workshop flyers you can use as samples to help create your own workshop flyer.

Final Note

The CSE agreement will be solely between you and your subscribers. We are here to support you, but we are not part of the agreement (we do not want to play the role of guarantor to your subscribers). We are only providing an idea and some support structures to help you create your own CSE program. We will put you in touch with other participants who are doing the same so you can collaborate if you like.

Please don't hesitate to contact us with any other questions.

Isn't this a sweet idea?

In support of you and your work,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dave Jon". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "D" and "J".

Dave, Jon, and the Horn Farm crew.