

VINES BINGHAMTON FARM SHARE : 4 Year Report

Overview of Binghamton Farm Share

Although Binghamton Farm Share is a CSA available to people of all income levels, connecting farmers and residents in low income areas is a strength of Binghamton Farm Share. Each season since its inception in 2013 half of the share members have fallen within very low to moderate income ranges as set forth by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Share distribution grows each year and in 2016 an average of 65 weekly shares, bringing in around \$1,300 weekly, were distributed to members falling within these income levels. While there is initial work that needs to be put into growing relationships in these areas, the benefits reaped by both the share members and the farmers is incredibly worthwhile. Programs like Binghamton Farm Share help to lighten the load on the farmers by having a central contact for the members, allowing the farmers more time to grow their produce. However, farmers around the country are also successfully marketing shares and delivering to low income areas on their own.

Binghamton Farm Share (BFS) is a modified Community Supported Agriculture program, born from a study done in 2012 by the Center for Agricultural Development and Entrepreneurship (CADE) in Oneonta, NY, to determine the best way to increase access to good food in local food deserts. This study found that convenience and price were the top priorities for residents when it came to buying food, which BFS is able to achieve. Each week of the growing season Binghamton Farm Share goes directly into neighborhoods that lack fresh, healthy produce to distribute CSA shares from local farms. By accepting SNAP benefits and providing a 50% discount to income eligible members, residents can better afford this good food. This opens an untapped market for farmers, one that should be further explored as we move into the future.

Table 1. BFS Growth Since Inception			
Year	Total # of Shares Distributed Weekly	# of Shares Discounted Weekly	# of Farms Participating
2013	35	17	2
2014	80	40	4
2015	110	55	4
2016	135	65	5

How the Program Runs : Nuts and Bolts of Binghamton Farm Share

Binghamton Farm Share recruits local farmers with CSAs to take part our program. The farmers agree to accept monthly payments from Farm Share. In return BFS markets the program, processes payments and makes it possible for farmers to easily sell their CSA shares to smaller markets in areas facing economic hardship.

BFS creates the Farm Share agreement over the winter after coordinating with farmers and distribution locations. Locations chosen are frequently visited locations within neighborhoods such as schools,

churches and community centers. The agreement is an easy to understand document that captures member information from where they will be picking up to demographics for grant reporting (see attachment).

In April and May Binghamton Farm Share starts the real marketing of the program to folks through tabling, social media, emails and by going door to door in the neighborhoods served.

Agreements are entered into a Microsoft Access Database created specifically for our program. The database is able to track payments, grant reporting items (income levels, household sizes, ethnicity, etc.). It tracks how many shares are sold in a specific week so it's easy to order from the farmers as well as creates distribution sheets for the volunteers at the distribution sites.



Shares are ordered from the farmers a week in advance. Because BFS focuses on working within economically challenged neighborhoods there is sometimes transiency and unexpected circumstances that members face. Because of this the farmers agree that shares can be ordered weekly.

Distribution Checklist

- Marketing Information
- Recipes
- Farm Newsletters
- Office Supplies (pens, etc)
- Calculator
- Receipt Book
- Cash Box
- EBT Machine
- Paper Offline SNAP vouchers

The day before distribution plastic totes are prepped with everything necessary for running distribution (see box left). Members are contacted either by email, text or a phone call with a reminder of time and location of that they can pick up their share the following day.

On the day of distribution, farmers usually deliver the shares to one or two designated locations. Farm Share staff then transport the shares to the appropriate distribution sites that need them.

Distribution sites are staffed by volunteers. In 2016 over 400 hours of volunteer time was dedicated to running the distribution locations. In the beginning, volunteers were

mostly from outside of the communities that were being served but as the program continues our volunteers are usually from within the community.

Generally, two volunteers staff a site. These volunteers are responsible for accepting and recording payments, giving the members the correct share, and disseminating any information about the share or program that is important. Most weeks there is a sample that one of the volunteers will be talking about and encouraging members to try. A half hour before the end of distribution volunteers call members that haven't picked up to remind them their produce is waiting for them.

Making Binghamton Farm Share Affordable

Just creating access to healthy, fresh produce isn't enough to get people to change their habits. The other major barrier to incorporating a healthy diet is affordability. Binghamton Farm Share accomplishes this through three different parts of our program.

Through grant funding, BFS is able to offer members who fall within income guidelines for set forth by the federal department of Housing and Urban Development a discount on their shares. For the first four years of the program a 50% discount was offered to all members who fell within levels 1-3 (see table below – this table is based on HUD data for the Binghamton, NY Area). However, we found that each year we would run out of funding more and more quickly. In 2017, we are implementing tiered discounts where members falling in level 3 of the income eligibility chart are offered 25% discount with levels 1 and 2 continuing to receive a 50% discount.

No. of family members living in household	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
1	Up to \$13,450	\$13,451 - \$22,400	\$22,401- \$35,800	Over \$35,800
2	Up to \$16,020	\$16,021 - \$25,650	\$26,651- \$40,900	Over \$40,900
3	Up to \$20,160	\$20,161 - \$28,800	\$28,801- \$46,000	Over \$46,000
4	Up to \$24,300	\$24,301 - \$31,950	\$31,951- \$51,100	Over \$51,100
5	Up to \$28,440	\$28,441 - \$34,550	\$34,551 - \$55,200	Over \$55,200
6	Up to \$32,580	\$32,581 - \$37,100	\$37,101- \$59,300	Over \$59,300
7	Up to \$36,730	\$36,731 - \$39,650	\$39,651 - \$63,400	Over \$63,400
8	Up to \$40,890	\$40,891 - \$42,200	\$42,201- \$67,500	Over \$67,500

Binghamton Farm Share also has the ability to process EBT/SNAP benefits. By accepting SNAP benefits members can use some of their food budget directly on fresh produce from local farms.

Member Education

Binghamton Farm Share has found that the key to retention is member education. Through the NESARE grant we were able to produce extensive materials for our members. Each week members receive a recipe that ingredients include some of the produce that are found in the shares that week. Importantly, the other ingredients are familiar and things that members would either have on hand or easily be able to purchase. Often the recipes are variations on common recipes such as carrot tacos or zucchini crab cakes.

In addition, BFS was receiving feedback that produce wasn't staying fresh long. While farmer's examined how they were shipping the produce we also decided to concentrate on storage. Reminding members that they need to put their shares away properly when they arrive home and giving them explicit instructions on how to do so cut down on the number of complaints received. Guides created include: Care for your Share (below) , Quick Guides that give a tips on storage, easy use and long term

storage and a freezing guide. Also created were guides for Herb storage, using spices and basics for

roasting, stir frying, and pickling. Since making these guides and implementing our Member Education the occurrences of complaints that either the produce went bad quickly or was wasted has decreased.

It's important to note that in year 4 a mid-season survey was also administered so that BFS could understand what members needed more information on and what their feedback was on shares.

Strong Farms, Strong Program

Binghamton Farm Share works with five local farms. Each of them have their own strengths. We try to bring the farms together annually to learn from these strengths and discuss challenges faced. When our farms are strong, our program is strong.

The NESARE grant allowed us to hold a number of different trainings for our partner farms. Two marketing trainings were provided over the course of the grant period. The first was a basic overview of creating promotional materials, utilization of social media, what photographs are

best to use and how to strategically use limited time. This started to get our partner farms thinking about their marketing.

The second was more advanced and provided further understanding of marketing strategies for our partner farms. This training further discussed the use of social media, concentrating on the importance of branding and storytelling in all marketing outlets. Farmers learned how to create a marketing plan and timeline that was feasible to use during the busy growing season.

Through conversations and surveys of our partner farms we recognized that labor was a necessary area of technical assistance. Without having proper labor in place it becomes difficult to face challenges and grow. Farms indicated that they wanted to discuss ways of obtaining labor, what other farms were doing to retain their labor force and understand fair labor practices. Eric Denk, Agriculture Labor Program and Communications Specialist for the Department of Labor, came to speak to our farmers about compliance for both workers and growers and brought many resources to share. As well, each farm shared their unique ways of obtaining and retaining labor.

Over the years Binghamton Farm Share Farmers have adopted the following changes:

Packaging

- Binghamton Urban Farm adopted a new style of plastic CSA boxes which can be sanitized, moving them closer to future GAPs certification.

How to Care for Your VINES Farm Share

Remember to separate your share and store it properly!
Follow these guidelines so your produce stays fresh:

Eat Quick (48 hours) Corn, Strawberries, Raspberries Store: in plastic bags in fridge	Eat Quick (3 -5days) Bok choy, Collards, Cherries, Kale, Peaches, Salad greens*, Swiss chard, Tatsoi Store: in dry plastic bags loosely sealed in fridge
Eat Soon (up to 1 week) Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, Cauliflower, Cucumbers, Daikon Radishes, Fennel, Green beans, Jalapenos, Leeks, Microgreens, Pears, Peas, Peppers, Scallions, Spinach, Summer squash, Zucchini Store: in dry plastic bags loosely sealed in fridge	Eat Soon (up to 1 week) Cantaloupe [^] , Peaches [^] , Tomatoes Store: At room temperature Eggplant Store: in a cool, dry place <small>[^]Once ripe store in fridge</small>
Take your Time (2 weeks to a month) Apples, Blueberries, Beets, Cabbage, Carrots, Celery, Edamame, Garlic Scapes, Herbs, Kohlrabi, Parsnips, Radishes, Rhubarb, Turnips, Watermelon Store: remove greens from roots & keep in cool, dry storage or fridge	Store it (for several weeks) Celeriac, Garlic, Ground Cherries, Onions, Potatoes, Pumpkin, Thyme, Tomatillos, Winter squash, Store: in a cool, well ventilated area out of direct sunlight <i>Exception: celeriac anshould be refrigerated in a loose plastic bag</i>

*Salad greens include: arugula, lettuce, mizuna, mustard greens, radicchio, and Italian dandelion greens

Contact Binghamton Farm Share: 607-238-3522, farmshare@vinesgardens.org, www.vinesgardens.org/farmshare or find us on Facebook/BinghamtonFarmShare



- North Windsor Berries adopted using plastic bags and clam shells for distributing their share.
- Shared Roots Farm began to use cardboard CSA boxes to transport their shares (see photograph on the left).

Marketing

- After the second training we saw an increase in social media presence with many of our partner farms, especially incorporating their story into their marketing. Posts went from a product based theme to a farm/people based theme. Shared Roots Farm and Main Street Farms are two very distinct examples of how their marketing changed.

Links to Social Media Marketing

<https://www.facebook.com/SharedRootsFarm/>
<https://www.instagram.com/mainstreetfarms/>

Refining Shares

- Main Street Farm adopted a new smaller size share created specifically for Binghamton Farm Share members (see photograph below).



Volunteers

Binghamton Farm Share strives to create community around food and it starts with volunteers. A group of volunteers, most local to the neighborhoods served, staff the distribution sites, keeping the overhead costs low. Volunteers are both very enthusiastic about the program and very knowledgeable about the preparation of different vegetables. They do a fantastic job of creating community at each individual distribution site. End of season surveys always cite both the friendliness and knowledge of the distribution site staff as well as how members felt they had made new connections with like-minded people in their community.



Two Farm Share member volunteers at our distribution site at the Carlisle Community Center.

We began to provide a volunteer incentive in 2016, which allowed volunteers who income qualify to receive an additional 20-40% discount on their shares based on hours volunteered. It's our way of investing in the people who are investing in our program.

Sometimes [volunteering at distribution] was the only time during the week I would leave my house... It was scary not to be able to leave my house and having something to do each week truly helped me... Volunteering for BFS is special because it saved me and stopped a downward spiral I was headed towards. I loved the volunteer work I did for BFS.

- Binghamton Farm Share Volunteer

Over the past years our volunteer base has grown. In 2015 we had nearly 260 hours of volunteer time logged. This grew by 60% in 2016 to over 400 hours.