

Priority Issues for MACSAC

The following nine issues were identified by the board in a Strategic Planning Process held on November 19, 2005 as key issues for MACSAC to address in the coming years. This process also considered recommendations of the PartnerShares and Foodbook Committees. See action plans included in this document- note the board has not yet developed action plans for each strategic issue.

- **Develop and articulate membership benefits for member farmers**
Improve quality & expand as resource for farmers, create stronger network among farmers, strengthen relationships/provide more incentive for farmers to join MACSAC
- **New CSA farm assistance**
Improving the organization's capacity as a resource for new farms
- **Interact in public policy arena**
- **Develop & articulate membership benefits for CSA members:**
Improve MACSAC/CSA member relationship, address invisibility of MACSAC to new CSA members, accessibility for new members
- **Become a regional resource**
- **Expand social justice work through Partner Shares**
Reach & assist new members through PS
- **Collaborate w/other organizations/groups**
- **Expand & diversify funding**
- **Strengthen internal organization**
How to grow MACSAC w/limited staff/paid hours, solidify staffing, strengthen board

Strategic Issue #1: Develop & articulate membership benefits for member farmers

What we offer now:

Spring Open House, farm list, website, foodbook discount, Physicians Plus rebate for members (marketing/promotion), winter gatherings (networking opportunities), Partner Shares funds (after member for 1 year).

The Vision:

Farmers want to join MACSAC due to benefits offered.

Benefits are great enough to influence farms to conform to MACSAC ideals (organic, etc.)

Benefits are widely known, accessible, and used by member farms

Being endorsed by MACSAC is equated w/high quality farms.

Potential new benefits:

- Weekly insert for use in CSA newsletters (addressing current issues, events, familiarizing CSA members w/MACSAC)
- Health Insurance (IN PROGRESS)
- Improve/increase networking (winter gatherings, etc.), online chat forums or list serves
- Advocacy for farms and farmers
- Coordinating farm interns/free help/paid positions
- Providing farmers with connections to new markets i.e. weekly bulk orders from community meal organizations
- Coordinating transportation from drop sites for members who need it (i.e. homebound, elderly)
- Coordinating a program for people who want to share CSA memberships or provide a free pickup to other members if they are on vacation
- 'Free food for a week' promotion where all MACSAC farms offer 1 week for free for households to learn about CSA.
- Ability to accepting food stamps (IN PROGRESS)
- Increasing pool of \$ available through Partner Shares (this goes directly back to the farms)

Plans into Action

Who: Staff, Committees

When: Health Insurance & food stamps already in progress (staff), great time to begin organizing newsletter inserts for next season/planning topics, etc.

How: Survey at November meeting will help us better identify farmer needs

Strategic Issue #2: New Farm Assistance

The Vision:

- Every grower who has an inkling of wanting to be a CSA farmer has the resources
- New farms connected to possible land opportunities and mentor farmers to check in with
- Resources available to all new growers: regarding production CSA member relations (events, cooking etc), business management, financials, planting schedules, budgets, planting quantities
- Formalized, sequenced process in place to help potential farmers find internships and gain experience
- Resource sharing list beyond MACSAC farms
- Better methods for buying/selling equipment among farmers – post on website buy and sell page
- Revolving low interest fund, small loan fund
- Program for people with land to connect with those looking. Retiring farmers connecting with new farmers. This would include contact with existing farms who do not know much about CSA farming (through Dept of Ag)

Plans into Action

- New growers are each assigned a mentor grower for one year.
- Find out which existing farmers are available as mentors for specific technical issues
- Create and distribute this resource list to new growers
- Update this resource list annually
- Probationary/trial farms would receive this Kit and would be available for a mentor (Farms accepted into the coalition get priority)
- Other local farms (geographically defined) receive classified ads, CSA Info kit
- **Create a CSA Toolkit** that is regional in scope and includes: Production, budget info, member relations, Information about MACSAC benefits, a Resource sharing list – physical materials: tools, machinery, chicken cages, transportation trucks, Land opportunities, Programs that might exist (craft, farm beginnings) to connect new growers to farms that need farmers, Buy/sell equipment compilation, classified ads (create new page on website)
- **Create a notebook for members of the Coalition that includes:** Planting logs, schedules, budgets, specific production info CSA farmers are willing to give.

(See reverse)

Strategic Issue #2: New Farm Assistance

Specific Actions

New Grower Orientation

- Everyone gets packet – CSA toolkit (John Hendrickson)
 - Production
 - Business/Budget
 - Member Relations
- Everyone is hooked up with mentor
- Everyone gets listing of people willing to provide technical assistance

Mentor program

- Identify potential mentors – membership meeting sign-up
- Connecting new growers and mentors – new grower committee
- 4 calls initiated by mentor, including one early on

Technical Assistance Program

- Identify people for program at grower meeting
- Look beyond MACSAC for resources
- Provide as a benefit for members

CSA Training Farm

- Existing farms ready to take on 3rd year interns for management experience – program could help compensate for that

On Website:

- Resource sharing list
- Sharing a list compiling what people are willing to share – physical materials: tools, machinery, chicken cages, transportation trucks

Strategic Issue #3 Collaboration

Goals:

- Strengthen Impact of outreach
- Eliminate repetition of efforts
- Secure new funding sources
- Serve as a model organization for other areas, perhaps raise \$through consultation with other groups
- Consumer education- tie in with more traditional orgs such as extention, 4-H etc
- Make connections with other cultural groups through food/farming to overcome cultural barriers
- Training for CSA famrers through orgs that have similar philosophies (environmenta,, food, social justice) and facilities/opportunities

Potential Partners

- Saint Benedicts
- Faith Communities
- Community Dev orghs
- Chamber of Commerce
- Michael Fields/CSA learning center
- Farmers union
- Urban ecology center
- Extension
- Multicultural orgs
- Grassroots leadership college
- Edgewood college, UW, MATC etc
- Nonprofit orgs food/nutrition
- Corporate wellness programs

Strategic Issue #4: Become a regional resource

What is happening now:

- Farmer in Dubuque wants to collaborate with other farms in that area and could use MACSAC support with tools
- Milwaukee group evolved differently from MACSAC but would like to collaborate (programs like PPlus, financial support, providing examples of outreach tools and opportunities)
- There are other farms who want to grow organically but don't have the outreach available/tools
- Current name restricts how we are perceived (as strictly Madison focused)

Ideas/goals:

- Change name to MIDWEST Area CSA coalition
- Have MACSAC kickstart other orgs through capacity building
- Create a formalized program for other groups of farms who want to be CSA coalitions
- MACSAC sends off satellite groups

Barriers to ideal status:

- Name change may change how others perceive the organization. Don't want to seem paternalistic but want to maintain acronym recognition.

Potential Actions - MACSAC could help to kick start other orgs by:

- Hosting conference for people who want to be CSA farmers (Michigan group will be hosting another conference this year- partner with them)
- Assisting with regional/national media work, distributing press releases, creating a standard press kit
- Creating an advertising campaign (similar to Got milk) to cover all CSA farms with a short and catchy slogan
- Providing funding opportunities for new orgs
- Providing support for formation of other CSA non-profits (i.e. technical assistance)
- Expertise
- Serve as a funding or accounting mechanism (i.e. other orgs use MACSAC for accounting until they are able to set up their own systems)

Strategic Issue #5: Develop and Articulate Membership Benefits for CSA Members

Long-Term Goal: CSA members recognize themselves as members of MACSAC. They understand the work of the organization and see themselves as part of it. MACSAC and its members increase the power of their collective voice and use it to further the goals of the organization.

Strategies (in order of priority):

1. MACSAC contributes a monthly (or biweekly?) piece to each farm's newsletter. Each piece should include the website address. Topics can be settled on early so that some of the work of writing the pieces can be farmed out to volunteers. Topics can include:
 - Introduction to MACSAC
 - Introduction to partner shares
 - Detailing what MACSAC does for member farms – members love their farms, they will love MACSAC if MACSAC help their farms
 - (We didn't finish this part)
2. Add a forum piece to the website where members can log it to
 - Look for someone to share a share with
 - Share recipes
 - Find someone to pick up their box when they are gone
 - Discuss storage tips and what to do with unusual vegetables
3. Provide more recipes to members – highlighting things members are likely to see in their boxes in any given week or unusual vegetables
 - On the website
 - Through a bi-weekly e-mail?
4. Organize a short series of classes. Topics:
 - Food preservation – canning, freezing, drying
 - Cooking classes – ethnic dishes, dishes with the hard-to-use-vegetables
5. Develop recipe cards and a MACSAC calendar with recipes (to sell or give away?)
 - Recipes can come from the cookbook
 - Calendar can have photos of each MACSAC farm
6. Events!
 - Start small with a potluck and entertainment
 - Get big with vendors, entertainment, maybe classes, and charge a fee.

Resources Needed:

- A message for CSA members that clearly and concisely states what MACSAC is to them. One sentence. This message may be different than the one that is directed at farmers, but farmers need to know this one as well so that they can explain MACSAC to their members.
- Staff time and volunteers to write and distribute the newsletter inserts
- Technical assistance for setting up the website and the forum
- For the classes – teachers, a space, etc.

Partners:

- For the classes – Maybe Willy Street for use of the community room. And UW extension for teachers.