

# Community supported agriculture in urban settings

A way for better understanding and implementation of sustainability – a Norwegian experience

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## ABSTRACT

Norway covers an abundant wilderness, only 3 % of the land are cultivated. The last ten years the eagerness to form and join Community Supported Agriculture, CSA, has boomed. The initiatives are supported by NGOs and authorities. A literature survey shows what makes the Norwegian experience special and what is common with other urban efforts. The survey focused on sustainability in household and lifestyle. Hypothesis was that organic agriculture is a way for sustainability and furthermore a goal set by authorities and peoples organizations. Most important conclusions were that CSA indeed makes a step forward to sustainability even though some questions and conflicts of interests may appear.

### Community Supported Agriculture, CSA, is:

“A partnership between farmers and consumers where, at the best, the responsibilities and rewards of farming is shared”.

CSA implies three different values:

- 1) Dialogue, between farmer and consumer
- 2) Transparency in economy and
- 3) Shared benefits and costs. CSA is practiced in either a consumer- or a farmer-driven model. Furthermore, a characteristic is that members often participate in work on the farm.

(Soil Association)

## INTRODUCTION

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) in Norway has recently boomed from one single farm in 2006 to more than 50 in 2016 registered by the the organic movement of producers and consumers (OIKOS – Organic Norway, 2016). Please see figure 1. The Norwegian CSAs involves from 10 to 350 shareholders. Each shareholder prepays between 130 to 380 euro each year and volunteers in the farm work. Geographical distribution is showed in figure 2.

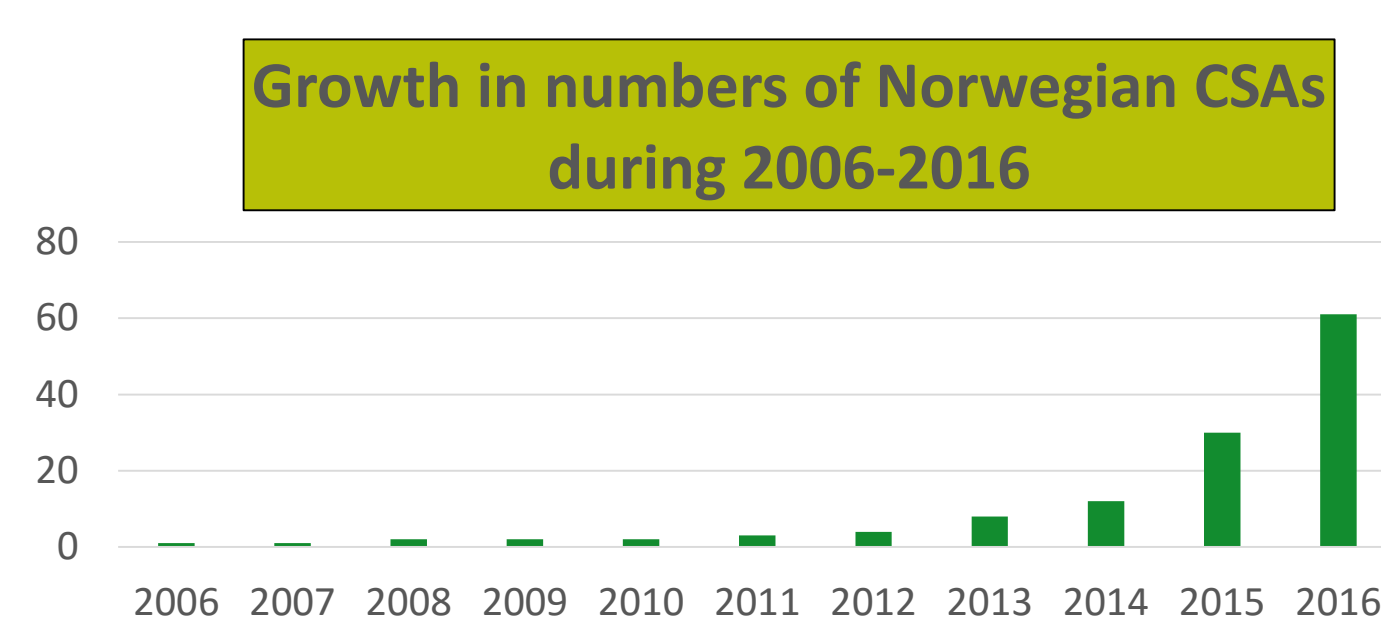


Figure 1: Growth in numbers of Norwegian CSAs during 2006-2016. Source: [http://andelslandbruk.org.no/-/page/show/3555\\_andelslandbruk-i-norge?ref=checkpoint](http://andelslandbruk.org.no/-/page/show/3555_andelslandbruk-i-norge?ref=checkpoint)

The Scandinavian countries hold rather ambitious national plans for implementation of organic farming. The governments justify this because it can be part of sustainable development. The national Action Plan in Norway is aiming for 15 % organic production and consumption in 2020. The big number of CSAs in Norway, all organic, is exceptional; Denmark counts for one, Finland for eight and Sweden for a dozen CSAs (Roisin, 2016).



Photo 1: Crops with information about harvesting, use and storing. M. Grøtta.

### Distribution of CSAs in Norway



Figure 2: Tentative map showing the geographical distribution of Norwegian CSAs. Guttulsrød M., OIKOS.



This paper aims to

- describe a new trend in society,
- outline what is special about the Norwegian experience,
- assess implementation of sustainability in aspects of ecological, economic and social sustainability.

Assessment of sustainability can implement a wide range of indicators (Dizdaroglu, 2015). This assessment will mainly focus on household and lifestyle.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

To investigate what makes the Norwegian experience special a literature study was carried out, comparing experiences from different countries.

Norwegian thinking is highly influenced by desires of self-sufficiency in different levels of society.

CSAs are enforced by Norwegian NGOs as well as public authorities.



Photo 2: A field-day at CSA "The sprout". M. Grøtta.

## RESULTS

CSAs in Europe initiated in Switzerland 35 years ago, spread to a few other countries and took off in the new millennium. It exist in 21 countries at the moment. France counts for 2000, Belgium for 138 and Italy for 104 CSAs (Roisin, 2016). Comparing the Norwegian experience to that of others firstly, one may list what is special in the Norwegian case:

Market statistics illustrates that 60 % of organic goods are distributed in alternative channels like CSAs, Farmers market or directly from the farms. Compared to other Scandinavian countries the distribution in supermarkets is limited (SLF,2016). Engagement of many people working on the farm, often people without agricultural skills, makes up a situation where pesticides are not suitable.

A questionnaire showed that people involved in CSA were committed to buy organic before connecting to CSA-projects, but such connection made the consume rise without hazards in private budget (Hvitsand, 2014).

## DISCUSSION

The idea of CSA is ecological sustainable, if some considerations are taken into account and can be done to practice. Often one will see that organic certification is not economic nor administrative reachable. Furthermore farming organically without animals is challenging. Nevertheless all Norwegian CSAs are organic farmed. The CSA-concept would only be a success in peri-urban areas. It is not an option in remoted farms. Protection of agricultural fields is identified as one of five most important issues in urban planning (Leipzig charter, 2007). It is probably more important in the case of Norway. Maybe the interest for CSA also is connected to this awareness and to some degree explains why this is the case in Norway and not in other Scandinavian countries.



Photo 3: Excursion to CSA «Virgenes Farm». M. Grøtta

## CONCLUSION

Conclusions states that following is special in the Norwegian experience:

- The commercial market for organics are still limited compared to neighbouring countries, this may encourage consumers to do something actively.
- The area of arable land is limited and mostly located in peri-urban areas.
- The engagement of NGOs to be leading actors is unique compared to other countries.

Furthermore it is stated that the Norwegian experience is sustainable in three aspects considered:

- Ecological sustainable because it implies low input, low contamination and high diversity.
- Economical sustainable because it balances production and consumption.
- Social sustainable because it give upcoming generation competence and understanding in food production and include a wide range of different people living under conditions where cultivation may not be possible.

The Norwegian CSAs are carrying out top goals for sustainability in a humble practical approach from the people.

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