

**Written evidence submitted by The Community Supported Agriculture Network UK**  
**(FFS0014)**

**January 2025**

The CSA Network UK is a membership organisation that brings together Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms to connect, exchange their skills and knowledge and promote a fairer, more transparent model of food production, where the risks and rewards are shared.

In the UK, the CSA Network represents around 200 farms and our vision is to see a CSA in every UK neighbourhood.

Community supported agriculture (CSA) is a partnership between farmers and consumers in which the responsibilities, risks and rewards of farming are shared. Consumers, often described as CSA members, are closely linked to the farm and the production of their food, and provide support that goes beyond a straightforward marketplace exchange of money for goods. This involvement may be through ownership or investment in the farm or business, sharing the costs of production, accepting a share in the harvest or providing labour. CSA helps address increasing concerns about the lack of transparency, sustainability and resilience of our food system.

The most common produce for CSA farms is vegetables and fruit but they also include flowers, eggs, poultry, pork, lamb, beef and dairy, also firewood and fish. In the previous basic payment scheme, subsidies were not available to farms under five hectares, as CSAs and horticultural businesses tend to be smaller, they have received on average one of the smallest amounts of subsidy of any farm type and many have received none at all. We welcome the move to delivery of public goods based payments and hope that CSAs, small scale farmers and fruit and veg growers will receive more support.

We are responding because our producers are experiencing substantial economic difficulties due to three factors,: increasing devastating weather events causing damage to produce and infrastructure, economic inequality meaning customers are leaving farms as they cannot afford fresh produce and, the reason for resending – the use of loss leaders and fake farm sin supermarkets suggesting cheap fruit and vegetables are possible when in fact the costs are hidden and the produce is often nutritionally poor. Additionally, supermarket practice means that larger farmers are unwilling or unable to implement more sustainable farming practices which ultimately damages us all, people and planet.

Current government policy to protect farmers from unfair treatment by supermarkets – the Groceries Supply Code of Practice (GSCOP) – is inadequate and rarely enforced. British fruit and veg farmers agree, with 69% saying that tougher regulations are needed to redress the imbalance of power.

Our farms and many other small family farms are on the brink of collapse due to this unfairness.

### **We are asking for two things:**

1. The Groceries Code Adjudicator needs to be empowered to take a more effective and punitive stance against unfair practices.
2. Retailers must (1) buy what they agreed to buy, (2) pay what they agreed to pay, and (3) pay on time, **without exception**. These three principles should be embedded into the GSCOP. A stronger, clearer code of practice is needed to make sure that all supermarkets stick to fair practices when dealing with farmers.

The [#GetFairAboutFarming](#) campaign of Sep 2023 showed that nearly half of all farmers were worried about going out of business in the next year with 75% citing supermarket pressure as the main factor. And 61% of the farmers surveyed said unfairness in the supply chain was negatively affecting their mental health. Of the farmers surveyed, 69% agreed that tougher regulations are required to redress the imbalance of power between farmers, processors and the supermarkets.

95% of our food is sold through just 12 retailers, this means farmers' options are severely limited when negotiating contracts and determining their produce's market. COVID clearly showed how this model is always close to collapse when demand for veg boxes doubled (and was met) at the same time as global and national "just in time" supply chains broke down.

Evidence shows that huge amounts of money are extracted out of the system as costs and profits. [Sustain's 'Unpicking Food Prices'](#) report<sup>1</sup> reveals that farmers often receive less than 1p of the profit from their produce, with farm businesses relying on subsidies to break even.<sup>2</sup> The impact is evident, with 40% of farms earning less than £25,000 annually. In contrast, on a CSA, 100% of the price goes back into the local economy, creating vibrant food economies and secure employment.