

Community Supported Agriculture for Floral Design

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Introduction

Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) is most commonly known as a way to bring people together who have an interest in locally grown food (Lang, 2010). Started in the late 1980s, CSAs developed from small farmers having a difficult time accessing credit needed to cover the labor, equipment, and operating costs required to start a growing season. CSAs operate by community members paying a fee upfront and then are provided goods throughout a season (Lang, 2010; Kolodinsky & Pelch, 1997). This need for resources upfront is mirrored in some school-based agriculture education (SBAE) courses. DiBenedetto (2018) recounted this burden by noting how resources are “a concern for all floral design teachers” (p. 22). Additionally, many people are unaware floral design, as well as other ornamental horticulture areas, is agriculture. These green industry is one of the United State’s fastest growing sectors in crop related agriculture (Cotton, Marsh, Hashem, & Dadson, 2011). Much of floral design course work provides opportunity for science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) integration including plant nutrition and care, plant identification, principles of design, and math accounting skills for money management and entrepreneurship (DiBenedetto, 2018). These STEM moments allow students to apply ideas from core academics to real life scenarios needed in order to make students college and workforce ready. SBAE programs, such as floral design, can provide a unique platform to connect students to their local community while at the same time promoting the agriculture industry as a viable career option. However, the concern for resources must first be addressed. This innovative idea program addresses Research Priority 3, “*Sufficient Scientific and Professional Workforce that Addresses the Challenges of the 21st Century*” (Stripling and Ricketts, 2016, p.29).

How it Works

Historically, funding for floral design classes came from the Career and Technical Education (CTE) budget. No money was officially allocated to the floral design program, was only awarded on an as needed basis, and was limited to the purchase of non-consumable equipment and supplies. This CTE budget was also shared among the other 16 CTE teachers and the numerous classes within each pathway. Therefore, funds were limited. Previous teachers relied on silk and synthetic flowers for the majority of in-class activities. This left a need for a renewable source of additional funds specifically allocated for the floral design classes to be overseen by the floral design instructor.

Starting in 2016, a CSA was started where teachers, parents, and other community members could purchase a “share” in the floral design classes for \$50 and receive five arrangements over the course of the school year. The first year, the CSA was capped at 20 available shares in order to make sure the project was feasible. Due to the popularity and rise in student enrollment in the classes, the second year the CSA was capped at 25 available shares with all shares being purchased both years. The CSA was advertised the first year by emailing an informational flyer to all teachers in the district, as well as by telling students in the class. The second year the CSA was only offered to students in the class, members from the previous year, and a few individuals who heard word of mouth. The CSA provided a disposable class budget for soft-supplies and materials of \$1000 and \$1250 in ’16-’17 and ’17-’18 school years respectively. While this was still a tight budget for the five arrangements throughout the course, a local florist agreed to supply flowers at cost. Additionally, flowers were also purchased in bulk through Sam’s Club, Inc. and shipped to the high school. Lower cost flowers were used for all designs to help maintain cost. Arrangements aligned with holidays, with the opportunity to add additional arrangements for gifts for the Christmas holiday, as well as Valentine’s day. Each

arrangement was done by students in pairs to reduce costs even further and each included a hand-written note by the students. Arrangements were delivered to local schools within the district by the instructor in addition to students with family member with a share taking the arrangements home.

Results and Implications

The Floral Design CSA has continued to prove an extremely popular, viable, and profitable option for dedicated class funds. The CSA not only improved the level of the curriculum offered within the class, but also the real-life feel that would of completing unique orders that comes with a career in the floral design industry. In consequence of designs delivered to CSA participants, the class was advertised throughout Athens. Local community members began reaching out for design for local events such as banquets and parties. The floral design class was able to make more arrangements for orders from individuals. This community involvement not only added more to the overall class budget, but as a valuable tie between the class, students, and the community. Lang (2010) noted how CSAs provide a tie between people who have a local interest in agriculture. The floral design CSA mirrored this relationship and allowed for students to make an impact on their community by providing a service. Furthermore, students saw arrangements throughout the high school from teachers who were CSA members. This led to steady enrollment of the floral design classes for the '17-18 and '18-'19 school years. Marsh et. al (2011) reported youth have a reluctance to pursue agriculturally related careers which in turn provides a limited number of prepared graduates to meet the needs of today's workforce. Additionally, it was noted that high school students do not see the "multidisciplinary nature of agriculture not as only the production and marketing, but also as the science of the disciplines" (Marsh, et. al, 2011, p. 9). Opportunities for our students to learn valuable career skills that also give application for in-class knowledge are necessary in reiterating the importance of agriculture.

Future Plans

The CSA has continued into the '18-'19 school year with a new instructor. The same format is still utilized with a cap at 25 membership shares. In the future, it might be necessary to raise the cost of the membership incrementally each year in order to keep up with the rising cost of floral goods.

There is a wide gap in the literature relating to floral design in SBAE. Research is needed in to the benefits of floral design classes, effective teaching methods, as well as the barriers for agriculture teachers who wish to take on such curriculum. Additionally, CSAs could prove as a beneficial method of fundraising for numerous other SBAE courses specializing in good and services. Research in to implementation of such programs would be beneficial for the SBAE community.

Resources Needed

There was no direct cost associated with implementing this program. Personal delivery of the arrangements by the instructor was utilized. Additionally, each arrangement included a card handwritten by students to increase the personal relationship with the CSA members. These methods are in line with Kolodinsky & Pelch (1997) who found that personal contact has a significant and positive impact on CSA membership. Support and buy-in from community members and stakeholders would be necessary for the success of a similar program.

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