

# What's in the Share?

## Materialising Tensions Between the Strategic Action Fields of Food Sovereignty and Organic Market in Community Supported Agriculture

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**Zusammenfassung:** Lange Zeit wurde die Solidarische Landwirtschaft als eine solidarischere Alternative zu den industriellen Ernährungssystemen verstanden. Ursprünglich beruhte dieses Modell auf gemeinschaftlicher Finanzierung und Teilung der Risiken. Heute spiegelt dieses alternative landwirtschaftliche Feld jedoch zunehmend marktorientierte Normen wider, beispielsweise in Bezug auf Preisgestaltung, Qualitätserwartungen und Kundenzufriedenheit. In diesem Beitrag untersuchen wir, wie Initiativen der solidarischen Landwirtschaft zwischen zwei konkurrierenden strategischen Handlungsfeldern interagieren: dem Feld der Ernährungssouveränität einerseits und dem des biologischen Agrarmarkts andererseits. Aufbauend auf der Theorie strategischer Handlungsfelder analysieren wir den wöchentlichen Gemüseanteil („Share“) als materielle Manifestation, durch welche diese Spannungen sichtbar und verhandelbar werden. Die Analyse der Daten von zwölf Initiativen der solidarischen Landwirtschaft in Frankreich – einschließlich kontinuierlicher Dokumentation der Gemüseanteile und Interviews mit den Erzeuger\*innen – offenbart, dass die Zusammensetzung, Vielfalt und Preisgestaltung der Gemüseanteile Ausdruck strategischer Aushandlungen zwischen Solidaritätsprinzipien und Markterwartungen sind. Unsere Ergebnisse belegen, dass die

Erzeuger\*innen der solidarischen Landwirtschaft hybride Strategien verfolgen, um wirtschaftliche Tragfähigkeit mit einer teilweisen Entkommerzialisierung zu verbinden. Die Gemüseanteile fungieren somit als materielle Manifestation interfeldlicher Positionierung und stabilisieren die solidarische Landwirtschaft als hybrides, sich entwickelndes Feld innerhalb alternativer Ernährungssysteme.

**Abstract:** Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) has long been framed as a solidarity-based alternative to industrial food systems. While initially grounded in collective financing and risk-sharing, CSA partnerships can also reflect market-based norms, such as pricing benchmarks, quality expectations, and consumer satisfaction. In this paper, we investigate how CSA initiatives navigate these competing tensions by positioning themselves between two strategic action fields: the field of food sovereignty and the field of organic agricultural markets. Drawing on the theory of strategic action fields, we analyse weekly CSA shares as a material manifestation through which these tensions become visible. Analysing data from twelve CSA partnerships in France, including weekly share monitoring and interviews with producers, we examine how the content, diversity, and pricing of the shares reflect negotiated compromises

between solidarity ideals and market expectations. The results show that while not isolated from market pressures, CSA producers adopt hybrid strategies that allow for both economic viability and partial de-commodification. We argue that the CSA share, as a material manifestation of an interfield position, contributes to stabilising CSA as a hybrid, evolving field within alternative food systems.

## Introduction

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) has originally been portrayed as a model in which true cost recovery of sustainable farming replaces the profit-oriented logic of conventional markets (Cone/Myhre 2000). More recently, CSA has gained attention as a grassroots alternative to conventional agro-industrial food systems (Piccoli et al. 2021) based on the unifying principle of risk sharing (Volz et al. 2016): payments are made by a group of members to cover all the costs of the farm, even in the case of production losses. Middendorf and Rommel (2023) emphasise that this CSA model entails a shift from product-based transactions to that of community financing. Members finance the farm with an annual contribution rather than buying individually priced products. In the early 2000s, the French version of the CSA implemented a similar vision of community funding. Members were expected to pay for their shares for a whole season, so that the total yearly cost of running the farm was divided by the number of shares subscribed to equal the real cost for a full year (Les Olivades 2024, Decroix 2024).

In practice, CSA initiatives today are shaped by conflicting normative expectations as sustainable alternatives. On the one hand, they inherit a vision of sustainable food systems based on autonomy, solidarity and de-commodification. These principles are aligned with food sovereignty movements (Zoll et al. 2021, Schmidt et al. 2025). On the other hand, CSA initiatives operate in an environment where organic market norms influence consumer expectations around pricing, diversity, regularity and visual qualities (Hinrichs 2000, Schoolman 2021). These competing pressures are not merely theoretical, they are intensified by the fact that CSA functions as a hybrid institutional form, reflected in its diverse governance structures, member-based financing, and the everyday balancing of economic realities with ethical commitments when creating the weekly share (Middendorf/Rommel 2024). Tensions thus take shape in the practical decisions farmers make about what to grow

and what to include in the share. In this research, we focus on the CSA share as a material manifestation of these tensions. We ask how CSA initiatives balance themselves in the space between food sovereignty ideals and organic market pressures, and how this positioning is materially reflected in the design and delivery of CSA shares. By examining the content, value and pricing of 12 French CSAs over the course of a year, we explore how CSA initiatives are pulled in different normative directions. In what follows, we first outline our conceptual framework of strategic action fields. We use the theory of strategic action fields to interpret how CSA producers navigate competing logics, and how these tensions are made visible in the design of the weekly shares. We then present the methods and data based on the extensive monitoring of the content of shares in twelve French CSA partnerships. The results highlight the norms created by the practical implementation of CSA principles. Our discussion and conclusion suggest that while CSAs are not free from market pressures, their diversified and seasonal shares reflect a consolidated position at the intersection of antagonistic social movements and food markets.

## 1. Conceptual Framework: Interfield Relations between Strategic Action Fields

Our research examines how CSA initiatives balance the principle of risk sharing and the solidarity towards farmers with the provision of diverse, sufficient and organic vegetable shares. The objective is to show how CSA standards emerge from trade-offs between the strategic action fields where CSA initiatives are positioned. We consider the CSA share not only as a distribution mechanism, but as a material site where the influence of competing field logics becomes visible. Its composition, pricing and structure serve as empirical traces of interfield negotiation.

### 1.1 Strategic Action Fields (SAFs)

Strategic Action Fields (SAFs) are described as meso-level social orders in which actors engage in strategic interactions with shared understandings of field rules, norms and goals. The theory of SAFs allows us to understand how collective organisations interact to shape different levels of our social lives.

The theory of SAFs is partly inspired by Goffman’s Frames Theory (1974), which relies on the idea that a single social action can be experienced through multiple frames. It is also drawing from the theory of fields coined by Pierre Bourdieu (1979). According to Bourdieu, the position of each agent in a field is a result of interactions between three main factors. The first factor is the agent’s habitus, an unconscious way of living that shapes the social actions. The second factor is the agent’s capital, which can be social, economic or cultural. The third factor are the specific rules of the field, which are practically, rather than explicitly, acknowledged by the agents. Bourdieu’s theory of fields has mainly faced criticism for relying too much on notions like habitus, which are limiting the actors’ capacity to act consciously, and for implying that actors are being acted upon (see, for example, Boltanski/Thévenot 1991). Fligstein and MacAdam’s (2012) theory of fields is an attempt to revise and enrich Bourdieu’s work by restoring agency to the actors (Suckert 2017). Their conceptual pivot is linked to a move of the focus from how individuals are acting in a field according to their unconscious habitus, to how collectives are coming up with strategies to gain an advantage in a particular field.

According to Fligstein and MacAdam (2012), each social actor, should it be an individual or organization, is trying to gain strategic advantage in and through interactions with other groups. Social life is dominated by a complex web of strategic action fields. These fields are constructed “on a situational basis, as shifting collections of actors come together to define new issues and concerns as salient” (Fligstein/McAdam 2012: 10). Each agent is framing their action as part of a field with specific goals and rules,

exactly like in a game. Depending on the field where the actors are positioning themselves, they might be incumbents, occupying a dominant position, or challengers, thus opposing the power holders. The first key aspect of SAF is that the collective actors, through their interactions and their social skills, continuously shape the fields, and engage in cooperation or competition, with the possibility of changing positions. A second distinctive aspect of the SAF theory is the weight given to relationships between fields. A specific field cannot be understood by solely looking at its internal structure. It is necessary to take into account the multiple relationships that connect the field under consideration to myriad other strategic action fields. The boundaries of fields are not fixed but socially constructed and contested. These relationships can be characterised by the distance between fields, as well as by their quality and intensity.

Fligstein and McAdam (2012) suggest considering interfield ties as organised along a continuum ranging from no connections to many connections. There are three types of relations between SAFs. They can be unconnected, connected through direct ties or connected through indirect or third-party ties. Two proximate strategic action fields are said to be directly related to one another if they share direct social relations. This is the case when actors in different strategic action fields sustain routine interaction that connects the fields in an effective and repeated way. Proximity, or closeness, can be defined in terms of the number of relations, both direct and indirect. The closer the strategic action fields are to one another, the more relations exist. Distant fields are those that lack ties to one another and have virtually no capacity to influence each other. Conversely, internal field dynamics can have significant implications on proximate fields (Fligstein/McAdam 2012).

Within proximate fields, a further distinction can be made between vertical and horizontal interfield relationships. This distinction can be rephrased as a difference between dependent and interdependent fields. Interdependence refers to a horizontal relationship, in which two closely connected fields exer-

cise balanced influence over each other. A field may also be subordinate to another. In this case, the field subject to the influence of another field is said to be dependent on it. However, the data we collected does not allow us to go so far as to qualify the interfield relationships as vertical or horizontal. Instead, we can identify norm spillovers from one field to another, generated by the overlap between the two fields. These spillovers should be viewed not only as a space of domination, but also as a productive space, an “*interfield matrix*” (Kungl/Hess 2021). Coined in the context of sustainability transition studies, this concept captures how each field is embedded in a web of subordinate and superordinate fields, some of which are more closely connected to the field under study. The “*interfield matrix*” denotes the creativity of the encounter between two fields. Rather than focusing on the influence of one field over others by virtue of its rule-making power, it focuses on the boundaries of these fields as part of norm spillover, where new standards are shaped through trade-offs designed by actors. This work examines how the rules of a superordinate strategic action field influence the implementation of shared principles within an alternative food movement.

### 1.2 External Field Dynamics: Interfield Matrix and Norm Spillover

CSA initiatives can be positioned within an interfield space, which is shaped by external field pressures. As Degens and Lapschies (2023) and Guerrero Lara et al. (2024) have noted, it would be possible to map a specific CSA field populated with incumbents and challengers. Some of the field dynamics originate from the antagonisms between actors with different interests (see also Swartz 2014). However, another important aspect of the SAF theory lies in the relationships between fields. This is also where this study brings an original contribution: we move our focus from internal to external field dynamics. We hence conceive CSA as an interfield matrix, a space between two broader fields, rather than as a distinct field. We

argue that two fields influence each other and their boundaries might be shifting.

We consider that CSA initiatives operate at the intersection of two broader fields (Galt 2013, Galt et al. 2015; Parot et al. 2024), which share the common objective of challenging global food markets. On the one hand, there is the Food Sovereignty Field, which emphasises decommodification through community financing, solidarity with farmers, and collective risk-sharing. Actors in this field also promote resilience and community-driven standards. On the other hand, CSAs are also part of the Organic Market Field, where the emphasis is on the marketability of organically produced food. This typically refers to how well a product can be sold in its intended market, consid-

ring factors such as consumer appeal, ease of distribution, price competitiveness, and certification. In the organic food sector, the marketability of organic food involves effectively positioning, certifying, and distributing it through CSAs to meet consumer expectations, build trust, and justify premium pricing. Based on the literature (O’Hara/Stagl 2001, McMichael 2014, Zoll 2021, Rossi/Woods 2024), we delineate some key characteristics of the two fields, summarized in Table 1 below. These fields could be understood differently and embedded into other fields (global agriculture for example). But we choose to stick to these two fields because our primary goal here is to investigate the relationships between fields.

	Food Sovereignty	Organic Market
Origin	La Via Campesina	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM)
Field Settlement Date	1996	1972
Common Understanding of What is at Stake	Alternative policy proposal: offering the producers and the consumers the conditions to exercise their sovereignty and emancipating the small farmers	Organic market expansion: struggling for the worldwide adoption of economically, ecologically and socially sound food systems based on the principles of organic agriculture
Role of the State	Government as primary protector of farmers	The state as the primary guarantor of organic standards
How is the field connected to -CSA?	CSA restores farmers’ agency through community-backed partnerships	CSA initiatives are part of the organic movement and CSA farms are also simultaneously engaging with broader organic market channels

Table 1: Main characteristics of the strategic action fields of Food Sovereignty and of Organic Market.

The position of CSA at the intersection of two fields is clearly expressed in the charter of the French CSA movement, which emphasises the commitment of members to “contract and prepay for production over the contract period at a fair price” and to take “into account with the farmers the fluctuations and hazards inherent in their business” (Miramap 2014: 3). In return, however, farmers agree to “deliver sea-

sonal, fresh or processed, diversified food from their farm at pre-set intervals”, to “implement the necessary means to ensure regular delivery of the production shares as defined in the contract” and to “set a stable, guaranteed and fair fixed price for the duration of the contract” (Miramap 2014: 3). Thus, the requirements for CSA shares also include predictability, variety and quantity.

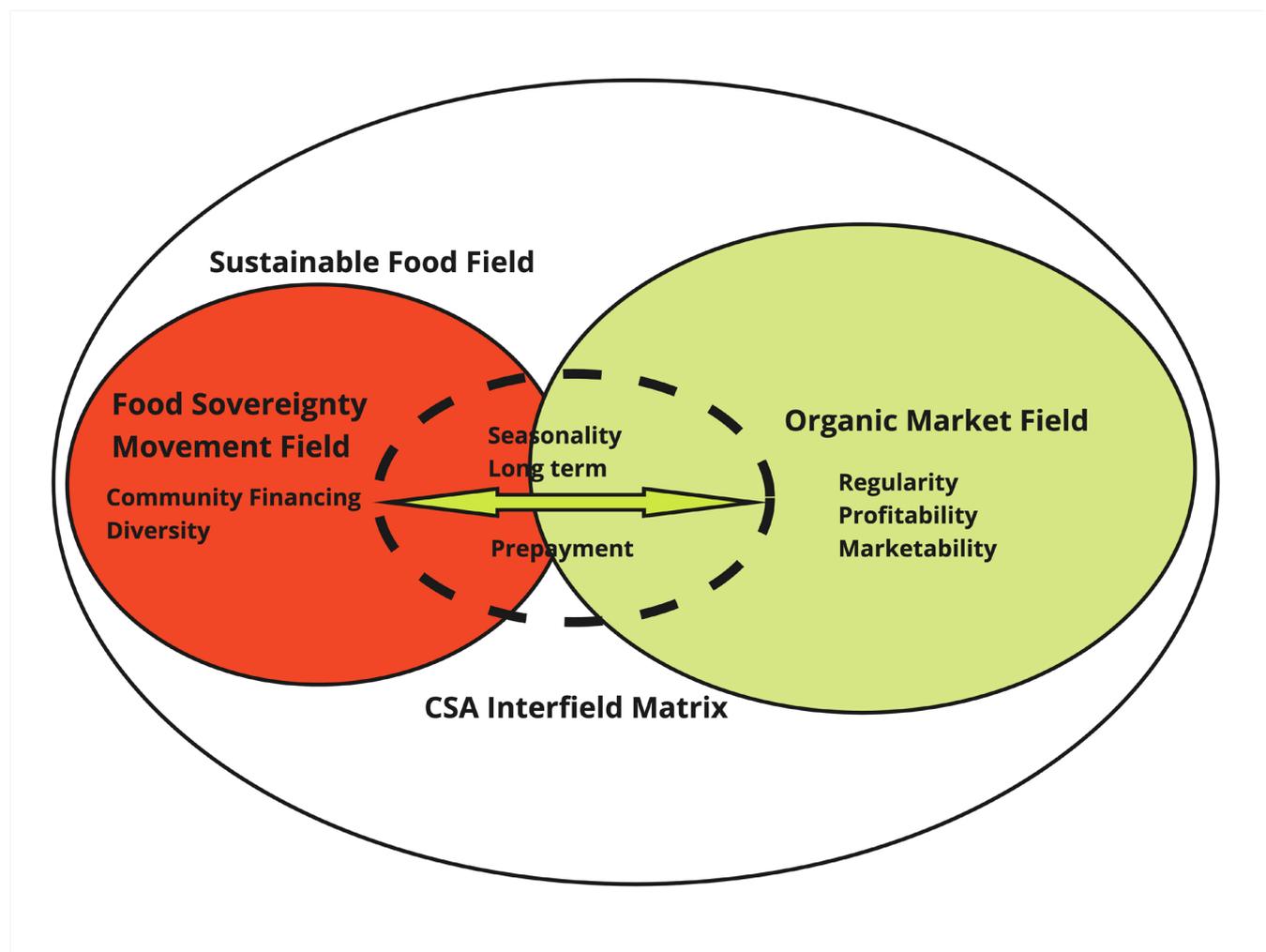


Figure 1: Strategic action fields where the CSA interfield matrix can be located.

We approach the weekly CSA share not only as an assemblage of vegetables, but as a materialisation of strategic choices made by producers within a dynamic interfield matrix. The CSA share embodies tensions between solidarity-based, risk-sharing and market-oriented consumer responsiveness. This makes it a meaningful unit through which to investigate a particular type of interfield influence: norm spillover. This describes how norms from one field (e.g., price-building mechanisms or consumers' expectations) shape practices in another field (e.g. solidarity towards farmers). In SAF terms, the CSA share is a field-level artifact - an empirical trace of actors' navigation between competing logics. Its content, structure, and pricing offer insight into how meso-level field dynamics are translated into concrete practices.

Thus, the regularity, diversity, and quantity of the shares reflect two key trade-offs. The first is between risk-sharing and risk-mitigation. Risk-sharing corresponds to the values of food sovereignty, with members accepting the variability of shares in terms of quantity and diversity. Risk-mitigation, on the other hand, corresponds to the self-regulating logic of the market, with farmers adopting strategies to minimise production variability. The second trade-off is between shared benefits and burdens of the community and consumer-oriented standards prioritising individual benefits and satisfaction. Following our objective, our main research question is: what is the nature of the relationship between the interfield matrix of CSA and the proximate fields of organic market and field food sovereignty? This main question is split into three sub-questions: (1) How do CSA producers position themselves between the field logics of food sovereignty and the organic market? (2) In what ways do composition, value, and pricing of CSA shares reflect this interfield positioning? (3) What norms and compromises emerge in the practice of CSA share distribution?

## 2. Materials and Methods

As we understand the CSA share as a material manifestation of the tensions outlined above, we conducted the first longitudinal study examining the contents of CSA shares over the course of an entire year. We opted for an explanatory mixed methods approach, and applied the explanatory sequential design described by Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011). Explanatory sequential design involves *first collecting and analysing quantitative data*, followed then by *qualitative data collection and analysis* to explain the quantitative results. This methodology is best suited when the research begins with a need to *test relationships, patterns, or trends quantitatively*, and then explore the mechanisms behind the results. During the first step, quantitative data were collected to draw a price and value comparison. This gave us a firm basis to move towards a definition of the typical CSA share. The second step was qualitative and involved interviews with the producers who participated in the data collection. These interviews aimed to understand their personal assessments of the period under review and the context surrounding their production. This enabled us to better contextualise the content of the shares and to understand the producers' price-building strategies. In the explanatory sequential design, both steps are designed in relation to each other.

### 2.1 Step 1: Quantitative Data Collection

We collected data from 12 French CSA farms. All were partnering with individual vegetable farms, except

for two partnerships that shared the same producer. All 11 CSA farms, located solely in Provence and Normandy, are certified organic.

	Region	CSA ID	Farming Type	Farming Area dedicated to CSA (ha)	Contract period (months)	Total number of shares distributed	Est.
1.	Provence	Pro1	organic	8	4 to 6	500	2010
2.	Provence	Pro2	organic	1	4 to 6	40	2022
3.	Provence	Pro3	organic	6	10 to 12	240	2003
4.	Provence	Pro4	organic	3.9	4 to 6	285	2007
5.	Provence	Pro5 and Pro7	organic	8	6 to 12	300	2003
6.	Provence	Pro6	organic	8	7 to 9	300	2009
7.	Normandy	Nor 1	organic	2	4 to 6	45	2008
8.	Normandy	Nor2	organic	6	1 to 3	53	2009
9.	Normandy	Nor3	organic	1.5	10 to 12	35	2013
10.	Normandy	Nor4	organic	8.5	1 to 3	130	2009
11.	Normandy	Nor5	organic	1.4	1 to 3	10	2019

Table 2: Main features of the CSA farms participating in the study.

Only vegetable shares are considered for this study. Vegetable growers are the pivotal producers in CSA partnerships: not only are their shares distributed more often than any other type of production, but they are the pillars around which multi-farm CSAs are formed (Volz et al. 2016). The monitoring of CSA shares was based on three main rules. Firstly, every distribution had to be monitored. The aim was to collect information about the date and location of the distribution, and the types and numbers of shares involved. If a distribution was missing, it was necessary to determine whether it had been cancelled or postponed, or if it had occurred without any data being collected. The second rule was that every item received in the share had to be quantified. It was recommended that the contents of the share be weighed by one of the members upon receipt of the share. However, this could not always be achieved. Sometimes, the weighing was done by the producers themself-

ves before distribution. A third rule was to monitor the contents of the shares for one full year to avoid seasonal bias. The official study period was from 15 March 2023 to 15 March 2024, though some CSAs had a slightly different data collection calendar.

A call for participants in the study was drafted to attract members of the CSA movement, particularly producers. The call emphasised the need to consider the material basis of CSAs: “There is still a very concrete expectation as a CSA member: a share of fresh, organic, locally produced food. Is that basic promise being met?” (URGENCI 2022) Another section highlighted the advantages of participating in the project, namely taking part in a study that would demonstrate the professionalism of CSA farms and help identify their strengths. There were two options for sharing the data. The first was to complete online forms designed specifically for data collection. The second option, chosen by most respondents, involved sharing

their own monitoring documents, in which they had recorded the contents of their shares. These were primarily Excel spreadsheets but sometimes also pictures of their handwritten records in personal note-

books or on distribution blackboards (see figures 2 and 3). Substantial harmonisation work was required to aggregate these documents.

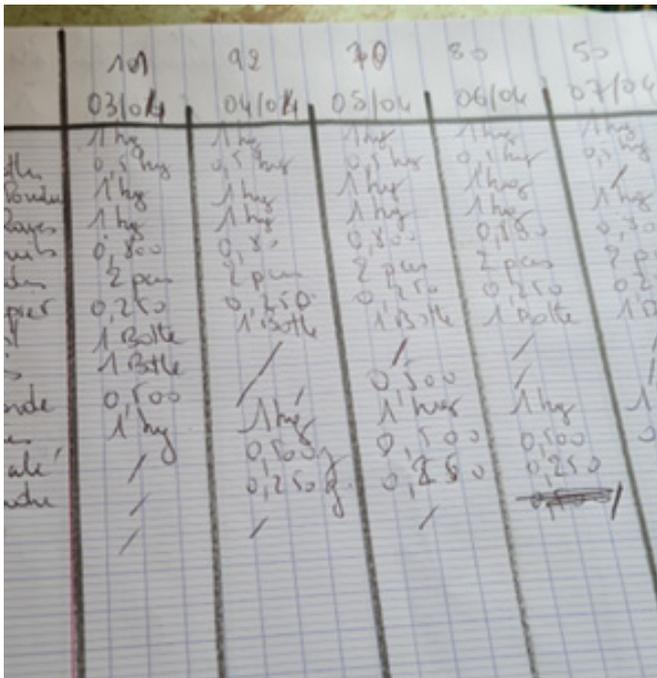


Figure 2 (left): Picture of a notebook on which the content of the shares distributed are recorded manually.

Figure 3 (right): Picture of a blackboard on which the content and the value of the weekly CSA share are announced to the members.

As our goal was to describe the CSA shares and examine whether and how they were connected to the organic market, we calculated a market value by linking each product in every distributed share to a price-monitoring database. A comprehensive database is available in France: the Réseau Nouvelles des Marchés, Market News Network (RNM 2024). This service from the governmental agency France Agrimer provides weekly updated prices for dozens of vegetables. This data is freely available and can easily be downloaded. Although it was time-consuming, compiling the prices in a single Excel spreadsheet and creating a formula to account for the unit (weight in grams or number of pieces) was a relatively simple task for calculating market value. We used the prices in specialised or-

ganic supermarkets, as the type of farms engaged in CSA partnerships are more likely to sell through the local specialised organic shops than through mainstream supermarkets.

To examine the factors influencing CSA pricing in comparison to the organic market, a mixed-effects model was employed in R with the weekly price difference between CSA shares and Total Organic Market Prices as the dependent variable. The independent variables included season (high weeks 14-13 vs. low weeks 44-13 harvest activity), region (Provence vs. Normandy), individual CSA partnership, produce variety, and total weekly share weight in kilograms. To account for unobserved heterogeneity across farms, CSA ID was included as a random effect. All other predictors were entered as fixed effects. To further

explore key effects, an ANOVA was initially employed. This design allowed for a nuanced analysis of the interaction between the regional context, and CSA share basket composition, offering insight into the strategic and structural determinants of CSA share valuation.

## 2.2 Step 2: Qualitative Interviews with the Producers

Short, semi-structured online interviews were conducted with the CSA producers after data collection to present each producer with their results. These interviews served four purposes: (1) to identify any misunderstandings or missing data, (2) to provide the producers with feedback on their individual results, (3) to acknowledge their role in the study and to collect their comments, and (4) to gain an understanding of the price-building mechanism. The interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes.

These were then analysed using a thematic grid and an encoding system to identify each interviewee's perspective on the main research questions. The first code, *Context*, covered the initial purpose of the interviews: understanding the context of each CSA farm and avoiding misinterpretation of the quantitative data. Some of the data collected using this code were included in the descriptive Table 1. Other elements of context covered events that could have affected the quantitative data collected. The second code, *"Farming Practices"*, provided further insight into each farm's background and situation. The third code, *"Price-Building"*, aimed to determine how the price of the CSA share was set, particularly whether it was set in relation to market prices. The final code, *"Content"*, covered all parts of the interview related to the criteria for assembling a "nice share" (*"un beau panier"*) (Pro3 2024). This methodology allowed for an interpretation of results that went beyond the numerical CSA share data, outlined the strategic decisions of the CSA farmers and addressed the core research questions in a context-sensitive approach.

## 3. Results

The quantitative and qualitative results are closely integrated to address two main research questions, each presented in the following subsections. We first show how the rules of the self-regulating market influence the individual implementation of principles. The second subsection focuses on how the actual content of CSA shares reflects the balance between marketability and independence from the market.

### 3.1 Market Prices' Spillover on CSAs

The CSAs monitored in this study are grouped by region: Normandy and Provence. There are four main results to be highlighted from the data collection: the CSA shares are (1) economically competitive, (2) highly diversified and (3) sensitive to seasonality. Their content is also (4) a reflection of the region where they are produced.

CSA Code	Size of CSA share	Average value of the weekly CSA share for one year (€) - Organic Market Prices (OMP) (€)	Average weekly price of the CSA share (€)	Difference in % between OMP (€) and the price of the CSA share (€)
Nor1	Small	13	10	30%
	Standard	16.1	13	24%
	Big	23.8	20	19%
Nor2	Small	8.3	8	3%
	Standard	11.1	11-12	1%
	Big	15.5	15-16	3%
Nor3	Small	11	10	10%
	Big	15.1	15	0,50%
Nor4	Small	12.8	11.50	12%
	Big	18.3	17	7,50%
Nor5	Small	9.3	8	16%
	Standard	13.1	12	9,50%
	Big	18	16	12,50%
Pro1	Standard	25.4	16.50	54%
Pro2	Standard	24.4	18	35%
Pro3	Standard	21.6	18	20%
Pro4	Standard	32.7	17	92%
Pro5 and Pro7	Standard	29.7	20	49%
Pro6	Standard	23.4	17.50	34%

Table 3: Comparison of the average values of the weekly share for one year (EUR) with the weekly price (EUR) in each CSA.

In the Normandy group, the theoretical market value contained in the share, expressed in organic market prices (OMP), is from 0.5%

up to 30% higher than the actual price of the share. In the Provence group, the OMP is from 20% up to 92% higher than the price.

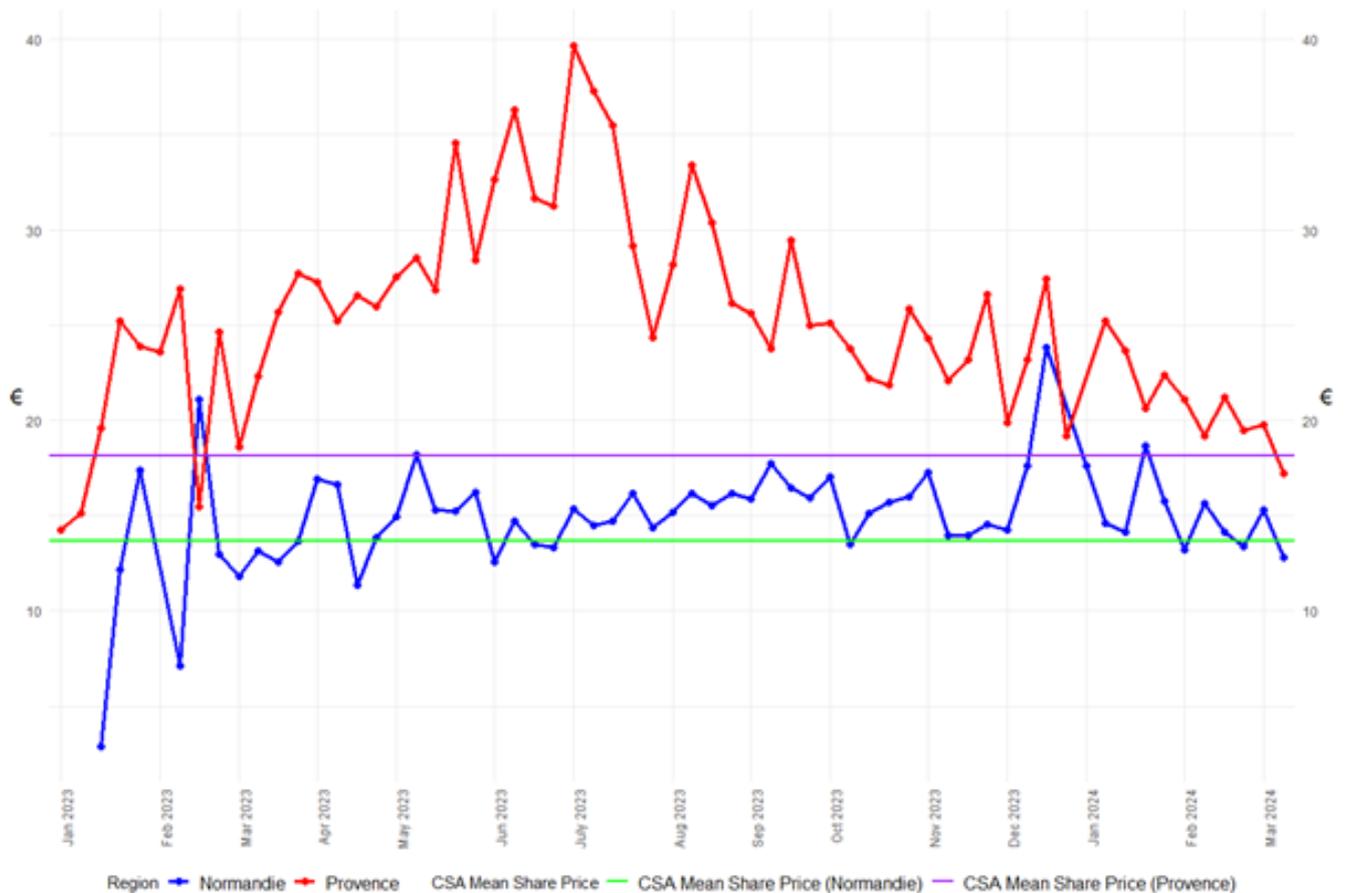


Figure 4: Weekly trends in mean share price (€) and mean OMP (€) for the Normandy and Provence groups, aggregated by region, based on full data provided by the CSA for the respective months in 2023–2024.

All ten of the respondents use market prices as a reference point. They compile these using local price lists from professional organisations or extension services. They also include their own personal observations in marketplaces and supermarkets. The estimated price of each crop is the main factor that producers consider when planning for the next season. The quotes below demonstrate that the CSA share prices are not decoupled from the organic market prices, showing that they are well integrated in the organic market field and are trying to hold their ground in this field:

*“I’m following a reference system used by the [...] local group of organic farmers. They have a direct sales price reference system, with average direct sales prices in the*

*[...] region. Based on this reference, I’m building a share following the estimated price.” (Pro2 2024)*

*“I started when the AMAPs got started 20 years ago. There was then a huge demand, but I didn’t want to risk having all the eggs in the same basket, as we say. [...] I am not weighing everything, I am comparing more or less with the prices from a small grocery store where I live. I’m also monitoring the prices on the market, I know a producer who is cheap, another one who is expensive, I’m trying to be in-between.” (Nor5 2024)*

*“We more or less follow the market’s trends, based on our past years. We need to keep a low price, otherwise we’re dead.” (Nor3 2024)*

The producers use strategies to ensure their share follows market trends. For example, they sometimes choose to supplement the share with additional crops from other farms. Only two producers stated that they did not add any external products to their CSA shares during the monitoring period. However, based on the interviews and the tracing of the vegetables in the database, the proportion of added products does not exceed 15%. Conversely, some producers try to avoid presenting a share whose value exceeds the market value. For example, Nor2 explains that, when they harvest something of high value, such as long green beans, they only include it in the more expensive shares. These can even be sold separately from the share. AMAP members can sometimes purchase additional products that are not included in their weekly shares. Nor1 reduces the quantity of items in other shares whenever highly marketable vegetables have been harvested.

### 3.2 CSA as an Interfield Matrix: The Emergence of Standards for the CSA Shares

The quantitative results reveal three main interfield trade-offs shaping CSA shares. Firstly, they are highly diversified and the principle of diversity that applies stems from the organic market. Secondly, CSA shares are seasonal. And, thirdly, their content closely reflects the region in which they are produced. The high levels of seasonality and regionality of the CSA shares can be considered as norm spillovers from the field of food sovereignty.

Considering the first aspect, the shares contain a wide variety of vegetables. Across all CSAs, a total of 93 distinct products were offered, corresponding to an average of 38-46 unique items per CSA over the course of a full production year. The product variety (PV) for CSAs in Normandy is six to seven items per share. The weights are consistent, with median basket weights between 3 and 4.75 kg. The linear mixed-effects model intercept indicates average CSA savings of €5.97 in Normandy during the high season, assuming an average share weight. In Provence, the

variety of produce is generally broader, with an average of eight to ten items per share. Share weights are higher, with medians between 5.4 and 6.8 kg. This bigger share further highlights regional differences. Even the weight of the shares differs from one region to another. This suggests that there is a specific standard for CSA shares that clearly differentiates them from the organic market, where one of the key rules is that same quantities of food are available anywhere at any given time.

At an average share weight, a CSA in Provence offers €1.21 more in savings than a CSA in Normandy. Since larger shares are associated with greater cost savings for the organic market price (approximately €2.67 per additional kilogram), increasing the variety of produce in the weekly share can enhance the overall financial value for CSA members by enabling higher share weights. Our qualitative interviews confirm that diversity is the main criterion for preparing the share:

*“We try to ensure a diversity in the shares. For the smaller shares, we try to have at least 3 or 4 different vegetables each time. In the large shares, it is rather 6 or 7 different vegetables each time.” (Nor2 2024)*

*“I want to provide a share that holds its ground. It means a diversified share. I want to avoid shares like what I have seen somewhere, with only peppers and different kinds of aubergine. There needs to be a combination of different things.” (Pro4 2024)*

The criterion of basket weight seems to be mentioned less frequently than diversity:

*“For me, a good AMAP basket, contains 8 to 12 items, let's say 10 items average, and around 5 kg. I put what I have. Sometimes there is less production, this is the ethics of AMAP, it's like that, ‘tant pis’ I keep track of what I offer in terms of items but I don't systematically weigh the share.” (Pro3 2024)*

Another criterion is achieving a visual balance bet-

ween heavier vegetables and lighter vegetables. According to one interviewee, a balanced share should also offer a combination of vegetables in different colours to create an aesthetically pleasing composition: “We are looking for something that looks nice, in good quantity, we need heavy elements, but also some green and lighter elements (spinach, salads). We are assembling a diversity of items.” (Nor4 2024)

Only two farmers reported having to cancel distributions in recent years. In such cases, the cancelled share, which had already been prepaid, was compensated with discounted shares later in the season. For both farmers, the decision to cancel was based on

the limited variety of vegetables they could harvest - three or fewer types (Nor3 and Nor5). The following overview is derived from the full dataset. To enhance clarity, the overview based on the full CSA dataset is displayed in two figures: Figure 5 presents data for the low season, while Figure 6 covers the high season. Both figures show a comparison of the organic market prices and the CSA share prices alongside information on the average share weight. The descriptive statistics show the average weekly distribution weight (kg) in blue box plots, while the organic market price (€) is shown in green box plots. The weekly CSA share prices are shown as red dots and are incorporated into the x-axis labels.

Low Season: Produce Weight (kg), OMP (€), and CSA Share Price (€) per CSA, during weekly distributions

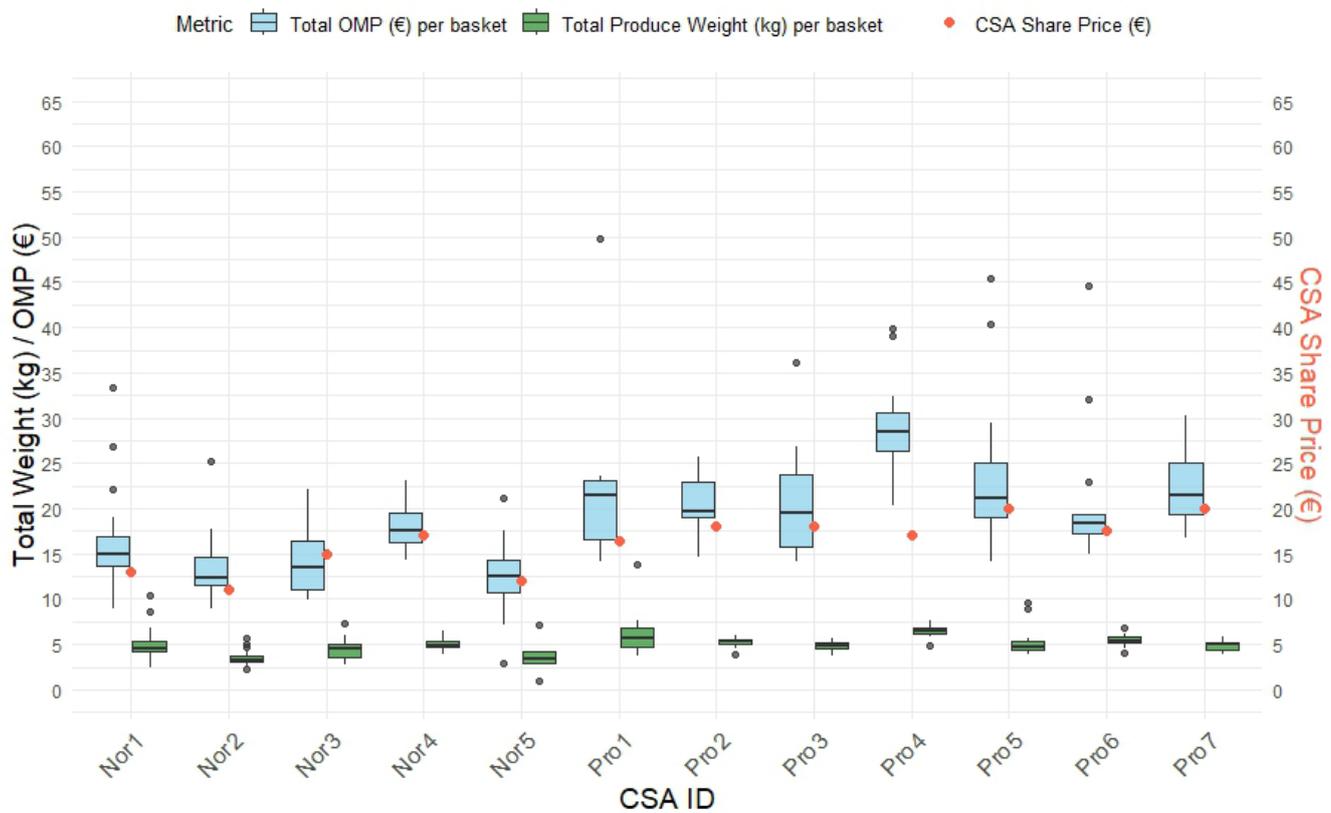


Figure 5: Produce Weight (kg), OMP (€), and CSA Share Price (€) per CSA, during the Low Season Weekly Distributions.

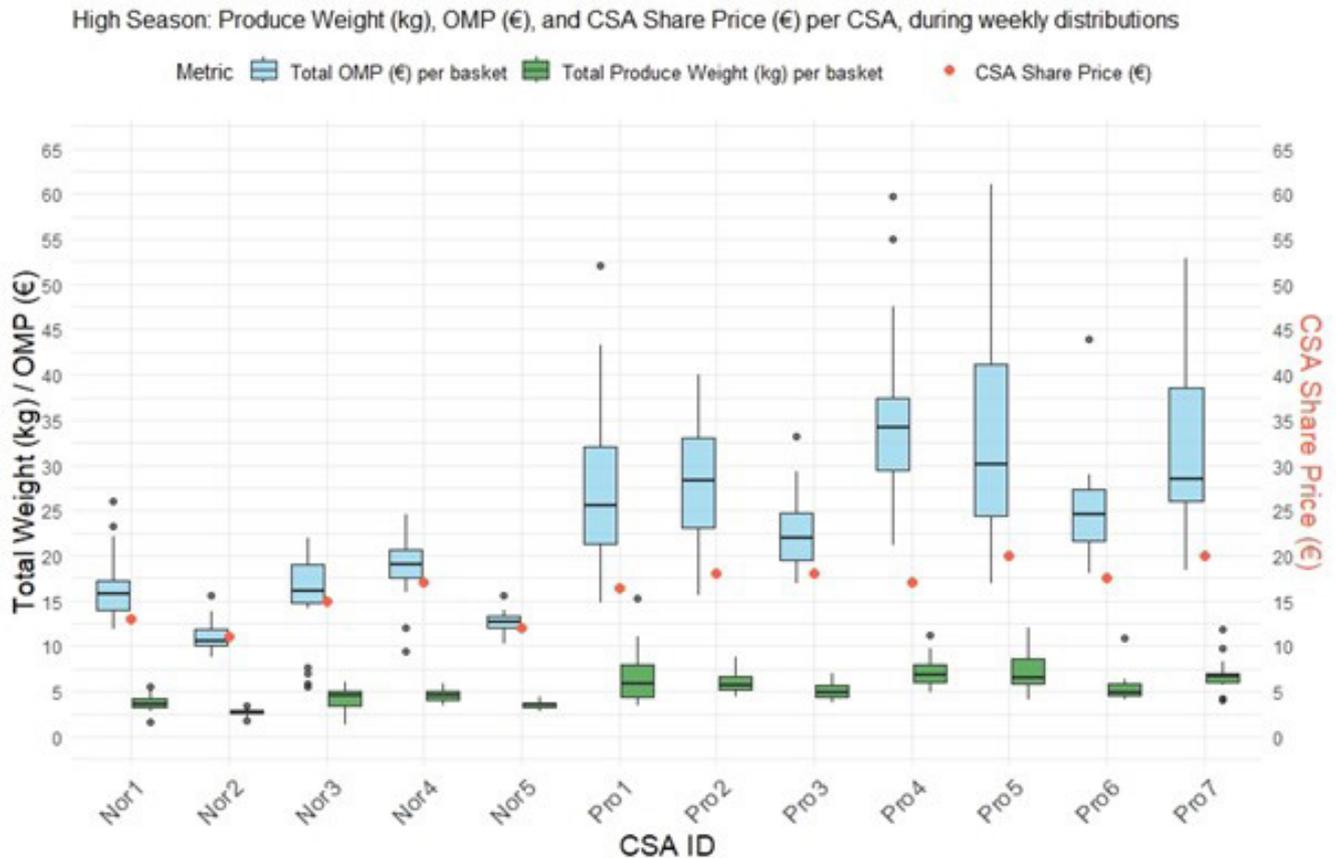


Figure 6: Produce Weight (kg), OMP (€), and CSA Share Price (€) per CSA, during the High Season Weekly Distributions.

In our sample, the difference between the CSA contribution and the organic market price (i.e. the price one would have paid in a specialised organic shop for the same set of vegetables) increases during the high season. Region alone does not have a significant effect ( $p = 0.3639$ ). Yet, the results reveal noticeable differences: Normandy CSAs demonstrate greater consistency in terms of both pricing and product weight, with narrower interquartile ranges (IQRs) for both organic market prices and weights. This suggests a more stable production environment and market dynamics. In contrast, the Provence CSAs display greater variability in both organic market prices and produce weight across weeks and CSA farms, with wider IQRs and more outliers. The Normandy CSAs appear to prioritise consistency and predictability, whereas the Provence CSAs prioritise seasonal abun-

dance and flexibility. The Provence CSAs offer larger and more diverse shares, especially during the high season. These regional differences highlight the influence of geographical factors on share price, and produce weight, as well as the difference in price between the CSA and the organic market price. Both seasonal and regional differences in CSA shares may reflect the influence of the field of food sovereignty, which puts the emphasis on supporting the producers and accepting their produce. By contrast, the organic market now tends to supply all kinds of products at any time of the year, much like the conventional market.

The qualitative interviews revealed the various strategies that CSA farmers have adopted to ensure the marketability of their CSA shares. Figure 7 below, generated using the data collected from a CSA located



Most of the time, the organic price curve sits above the share price line. However, the story behind the graph is that severe production losses were experienced during the summer due to flooding. To mitigate these losses, the farmer asked half of the members to take a “CSA break” (Pro3 2014). This was a scheme that had previously been implemented in this CSA, whereby members could opt out of up to three distributions per year. By reducing the number of shares by 50%, the vegetable grower was able to provide the remaining members with what he refers to as a “nice share” (Pro3 2024). Other producers have also raised concerns about offering “basic vegetables” and limiting diversity in the shares:

*“We need to have a diversity, at least 6 different things in the shares. We need to have a combination of root vegetables, green leaves, also the basic items like potatoes, carrots, onions. We also think in terms of preparing a meal. Sometimes, it is a bit less of everything but more diversity. [...] It is good to have 2-3 original products every little once in a while, but not too much.” (Nor1 2024)*

One of the farmers interviewed recounts trying an heirloom variety of cucumber. However, the members complained that it had too many seeds. Following this experience, he decided to reduce the amount of peasant seeds in the shares. Another respondent expressed a widely held view: “There are still some old-timers with the early AMAP spirit, but most of the consum’actors are now gone” (Nor4 2024). When asked about the practical limitations of risk-sharing, which is still presented as a cornerstone of CSA, the producers cite both their own professional conscience, which prevents them from providing empty shares, and the decreasing commitment of the members.

The table below summarises the trade-offs associated with the risks arising from the principle of risk sharing in the food sovereignty SAF (column A). These risks contradict the rules of the organic market strategic action field, as internalised by the interviewed farmers (column B). The trade-offs and norm

spillovers presented in Column C clearly demonstrate an evolution from the original CSA principles. This table illustrates how CSA practitioners engage with both fields.

Column A: Shared risks in food sovereignty -oriented initiatives	Column B: Rules of the organic market	Column C: Trade-offs and spillovers generated in the interfield matrix
Risk of having disconnected, sometimes much higher prices than in the supermarkets	Competitive prices all along the year for the main crops	Spillover from the organic market: competitive prices over one year, with substantial variations during the year
Risk of non-refunded empty shares	No empty share: mutualisation of production whenever there is a major crop failure	Trade-off: cancellation of distributions with compensation to the members
Risk of overproduction reflected in the shares: the same product delivered many times in the shares	Combinations between producers to offer a large diversity in each share and not season-bound products only	Trade-off with limited mutualisation between producers. Diversity in each share, but redundancy of vegetables from one share to the other
Risk of major seasonal differences and differences between CSAs located in different regions	Long-distance swapping of production between organic farmers	Spillover from the field of Food Sovereignty: major seasonal and regional differences exist and are accepted

Table 4: CSA risk matrix table, presenting the pragmatic trade-offs and the norm spillovers observed in our study.

On the one hand, CSA farmers and networks often explicitly reference food sovereignty goals (e.g., fair pricing, prepayment, social justice). However, on the other hand, they also operate within a consumer-driven organic market, involving reference pricing, branding, and retail expectations.

## 4. Discussion

In this paper we consider CSA shares to be the result of two intersecting strategic action fields: the food sovereignty field and the organic market field.

Although market rules apply to CSAs, compromises are made that are specific to CSA initiatives. Consequently, CSAs offer a diverse and competitive range of seasonal and regional vegetables, including varieties of uncommon varieties of vegetables not found in large retail supermarkets. Selecting CSA shares as the material manifestation of interfield tensions has helped to assess how CSA producers navigate these tensions. Firstly, shares reflect interfield norm spillover. We have confirmed and supplemented the existing literature on this topic by demonstrating how norms originating from the organic market field, such as

price benchmarking and product attractiveness, are internalised in CSA practices. Secondly, CSA shares materialise the pragmatic compromises that occur within the CSA when it is considered as an interfield matrix. The weekly share is thus a concrete output of interfield relationships and interdependence.

*CSA shares reflect a norm spillover effect.* Through the analysis of detailed quantitative monitoring of the CSA shares and qualitative interviews with CSA farmers, we demonstrate that market prices, rather than farming costs, guide the pricing of CSA shares. Similarly, we observe attempts to uphold the ideals of food sovereignty, such as risk sharing, seasonality, and prepayment. Hence, the CSA share has become a diagnostic tool for studying norm spillover. The stability of the share’s contents is achieved through pragmatic trade-offs between strategic action fields, as observed throughout our study. Unlike earlier research (Robert-Demontrond et al. 2017), our analysis does not position CSAs as being outside of agricultural markets. Instead, our results nuance the findings of Schmidt et al. (2025): conversion to CSAs does not always require a fundamental change to the economic model of the converting farms, which can continue to operate without community funding.

Conversely, our results tend to confirm previous research on price formation in the French CSAs. For example, Mundler’s (2013) evaluation of seven AMAPs revealed that producers alone determine the subscription price, based on local market prices reduced by around 20%. A study conducted by Les Paniers Marseillais in Provence (Brumault/Bolazzi 2014) showed that CSA shares were competitive and significantly cheaper than organic fruit and vegetables sold in specialist organic shops and even in hypermarkets during the peak season. According to the Practical Farmers’ Guide for AMAPs (Les AMAP de Provence 2016), even farms that rely entirely on CSAs can determine share prices using various methods, such as cost-based pricing, benchmarking against prevailing market rates, or aligning with the prices of other CSA initiatives.

Pilleboue and Pouzenc (2007) used the term “opaci-

ty” in relation to price determination, referring to a lack of transparency in pricing mechanisms. Lamine (2005) explains that CSA partnerships aim to manage shared uncertainties jointly by reframing economic exchange as transactions that acknowledge the irregularity of agricultural production, rather than being based on community financing, where the decision to set price is shared. Acceptable uncertainties were thus acknowledged as essential to minimise unacceptable uncertainties. Our study also aligns with Galt’s (2013) description of the evolving CSA landscape and the changing challenges faced by CSAs. Our interviews with French producers reveal a sense of change, with a shared perception that AMAP members are behaving differently from how they did in the past, and that the devoted members who once offered unconditional support, regardless of the contents of the share, have now disappeared. The disappearance of these “quintessential CSA members” (Pole/Kumar 2015) has allowed organic market standards to become so prevalent that one could speak of a consumerisation. The norm spillover manifests in CSA members turning into organic consumers. This consumerisation encapsulates a phenomenon generated by the interfield matrix, whereby the norms of a field are adopted by actors in an adjacent field when the two fields overlap.

*The interfield matrix between food sovereignty and the organic food market is a site of pragmatic compromise.* CSA shares materialise the strategic choices of producers. The weekly share is the tangible outcome of farmers’ strategic actions, like the decisions about what to include and exclude, how much to include, and how diverse and predictable the content of the share should be. These are all visible traces of the negotiations between solidarity principles and market expectations. This study thus makes a unique contribution to the SAF theory, by illustrating a phenomenon occurring in the interfield space: hybridisation. The rules and principles from both overlapping fields can be combined and rearticulated into an original set of rules. From an SAF perspective, the CSA field appears to be dependent on the organic market field.

Even if CSA principles are implemented, the organic market rules still apply, particularly with regard to long-term commitment and prepayment of the shares. The fact that most CSA farmers sell their produce through other marketing schemes as well as CSA, indicates a high level of connectedness to the organic market field through what Fligstein and McAdam call “everyday routine actions” (Fligstein/McAdam 2012). Middendorf and Rommel's (2024) CSA framework presents community financing as the central defining feature of a CSA. This implies a transparent co-financing of all CSA activities through members' contributions. Their definition of the CSA framework is based on the German CSA model, in which the bidding round system is a typical example of community financing (Parot et al. 2024). This system involves setting a target amount to cover all production costs. The target amount is reached through voluntary contributions collected from members at the beginning of the season, with contributions being collected in repeated rounds until the target is met. This enables members to contribute according to their own financial capacity. The French CSAs studied in this paper do not use bidding rounds and are more market-oriented. The approach adopted by participating French CSAs seems to guarantee that they can safely navigate the organic market and ensure the economic viability of their farms. The gradient of market orientation, ranging from decoupling via community financing (through bidding rounds for example) to coupling through the application of market prices, would be a valuable addition to the ongoing discussion on CSA typologies (from community-led to producer-led governance models) as proposed by Feagan/Henderson (2009), Blättel-Mink et al. (2017) and Middendorf/Rommel (2024).

Finally, this paper makes three contributions to the theory of strategic action fields. Firstly, it positions CSA shares as a material manifestation of field-level interactions and trade-offs. Secondly, it improves our understanding of how meso-level structures mediate between macro-level ideologies (such as food sovereignty) and micro-level practices (such as CSA sha-

res). Thirdly, it highlights how CSA initiatives innovate to balance social and economic logics in response to interfield pressures. However, further research on price-building mechanisms in other (national) CSA contexts is needed to assess whether the findings of our French case study can be generalised. Another research avenue concerning the CSA movement from an SAF perspective is the possibility of CSA being fully absorbed into the organic food market, which could result in the loss of its transformative dimension. Further research is also needed to understand how CSA networks are responding to this risk and attempting to re-legitimise CSAs as a social movement (Parot et al. 2024; Guerrero et al. 2024).

## 5. Conclusion

This research documents how CSA initiatives in France strike a balance between two collective action fields: food sovereignty and organic agriculture. Strategic Action Fields provide a nuanced framework for understanding the position of CSAs at the intersection of community financing and marketability.

This is the first time that such a detailed study of the CSA share content has been carried out. The shares enable comparative, longitudinal and quantitative analysis. Our data spans a full year across 12 CSAs in two distinct regions. We measured actual outputs (weight, value and diversity) and compared them to organic market prices, thereby grounding our CSA analysis in quantified data. This strengthens our argument that shares reflect positioning within a structured interfield relationship rather than idiosyncratic choices alone. More regular monitoring of weekly shares would allow producers to easily determine whether they are meeting their targets for providing high-quality CSA shares and facilitate further price comparisons. To harmonise this information with data from price monitoring institutions, it would be necessary to select a file format that is compatible with the price database. Another strength of this study is the explanatory sequential design and our ability to provide feedback to the producers, gi-

ving them the opportunity to reflect on their own results. Introducing a qualitative dimension prevented misinterpretations based solely on quantitative data. Furthermore, the exchanges with the farmers revealed the need for more research on price formation. The research presented here is a case study based on a limited number of initiatives within a single country. Consequently, it does neither consider cross-national or cross-cultural perspectives of CSA, nor the variety of governance models employed. Therefore, our results should be considered in context: they are only meaningful in a French context, for a specific type of CSA.

Our research shows that, although CSA appears to be a radical transformation of sustainable agricultural models (Zoll et al. 2021, Vincente-Vincente et al. 2024), CSAs do not withdraw from the wider market. Rather, they simply cultivate their specificity in contrast to anonymous markets. The main product of CSAs is the weekly share of fresh, locally produced vegetables. This is shaped by trade-offs between the need to maintain a presence in the organic food market and the field of food sovereignty. In the latter field, the rules involve a commitment to greater solidarity with farmers and community funding. The shares are thus the medium through which the CSA relationship is formed. They are the literal and symbolic means by which commitments are made and evaluated. Our study of these shares reveals that we are not just studying food; we are also studying how social norms, field pressures and strategic responses take material form.

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