Strengthening Local Farms through Fermented Food Partnerships

Saueressen, a new local food business, seeks your participation as we explore two models for the production and direct distribution of fermented foods: 1. a model that integrates with existing farm CSA operations, and 2. a "standalone model." A diagram on page 2 explains each model. Pages 3 and 4 contain Next Steps and Further Discussion.

About Saueressen

Mission: Saueressen uses farm-fresh fermented foods to research, develop and implement best practices in appropriate nutritional technologies for the purpose of enhancing community food security and food sovereignty. Nutritional focus areas include preservation and enhancement, allocation and distribution, capacity building. Saueressen exists for general public benefit.

Why fermented foods? Saueressen considers fermentation a key *appropriate technology* for human nutrition in the service of local food system safety and security. For more information, please request a copy of the Saueressen Strategic Plan using the following contact information.

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Sparking Dialogue

This paper considers both *outcomes* and *logistics* as we pursue opportunities to create low-overhead, value-added partnerships that can maximize the mutual benefit for farmers, fermentation artisans and customers alike.

Outcomes

Increased net income: Local farmers can reap the benefits of higher sales and production value with minimal increase in overhead.

Production loss recovery: Fermentation helps protect the value and marketability of cosmetically-imperfect produce and bumper crops alike.

Product loss insurance: Artisans preserve bumper crops through fermentation to help mitigate future product losses anywhere in the production cycle, from seed to storage.

Enhanced product diversity: Farmer-artisan partnerships increase the diversity and value of local foods they offer to the community.

Extended season opportunities: Fermentation can defer the late summer bounty when farmers need it most and increase the viability of late-season and winter CSAs.

Food system reliability: Fermentation preserves and enhances nutritional value, palatability, safety and shelf-stability of perishable farm products in storage, without external energy inputs, ensuring viable fresh food supplies in power outages and emergencies.

Logistics (see Further Discussion for examples)

Marketing synergy: Overlap between consumers of local and fermented foods creates opportunity to expand the mutual customer base of local farmers and fermentation artisans.

Integrated work-flow: Through partnerships with artisans, farmers need not deviate from their existing business and operations models to add fermented foods to their product offerings.

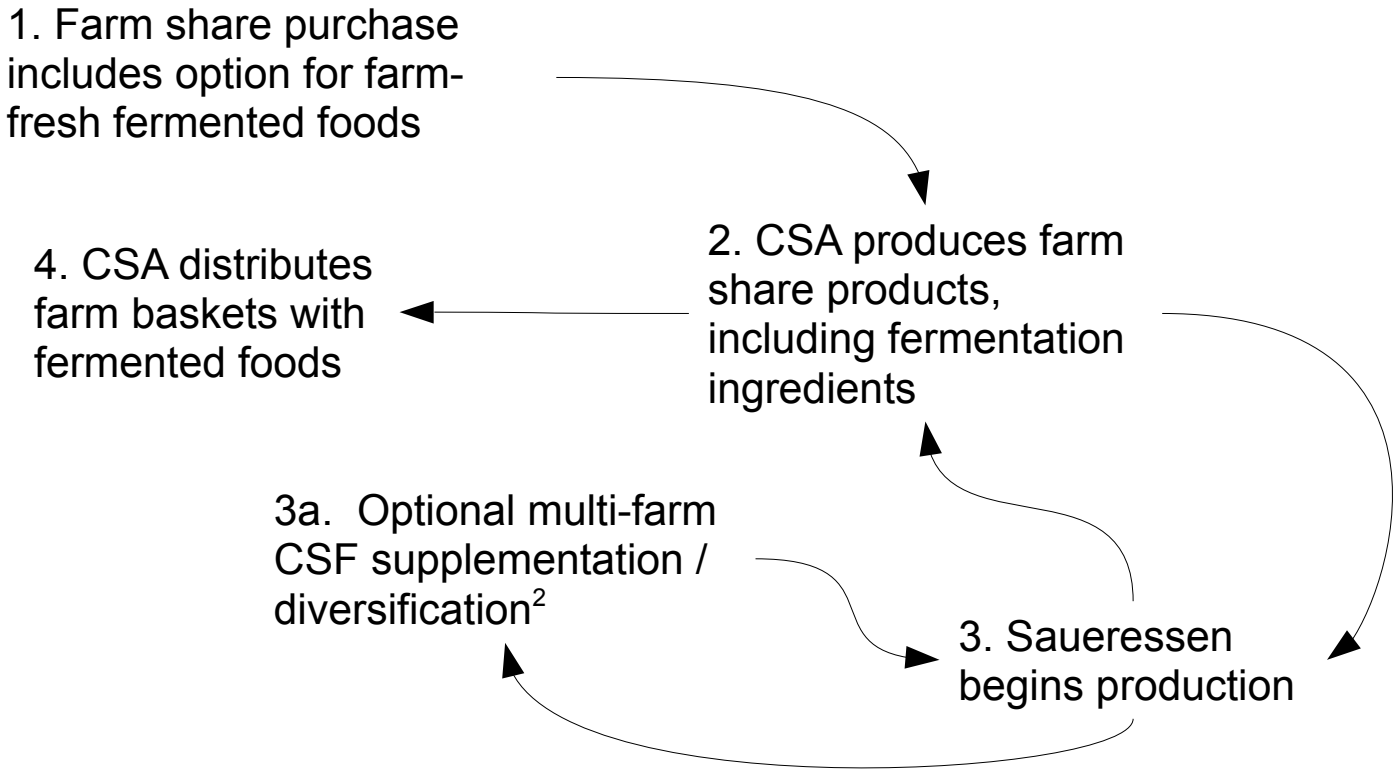
Complete quality control: Farmers and artisans work together to carefully control the entire production process, starting with local farm-fresh ingredients, to ensure consistent best-quality results.

Flexible product development: Farmers may choose from a menu of existing recipes or collaborate with artisans to create custom recipes that they feel best showcase the foods they grow.

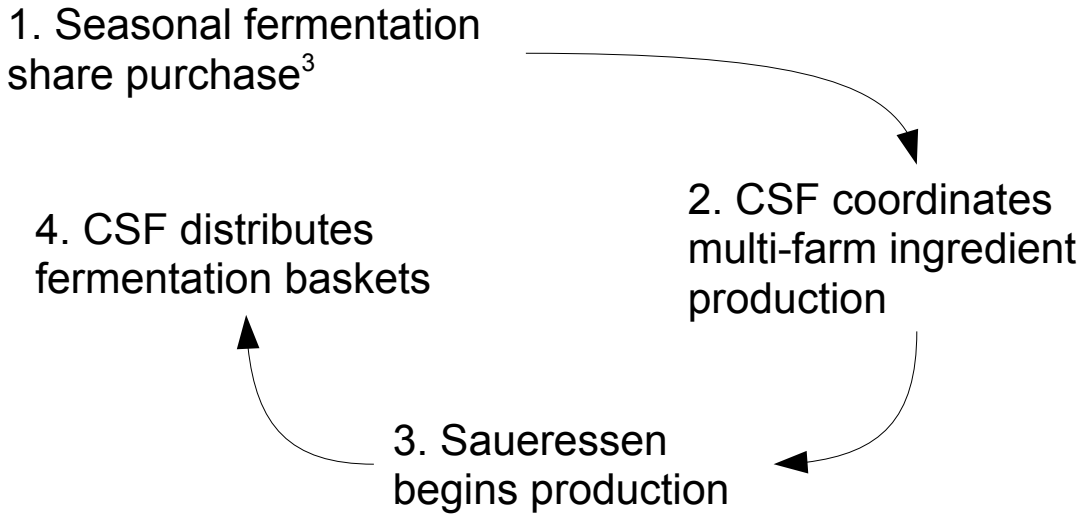
Multi-farm coordination: Saueressen can serve as a food hub for fermentable farm products from several different farms.

Community Supported Ferments (CSF) Models

CSA Integration (priority one[1])



Standalone CSF (priority two[1])



NOTES

[1]With CSA Integration, farmers handle share purchases and basket distribution directly. The Saueressen development plan places priority on CSA integration because of its potential to contribute value to existing CSA baskets while allowing Saueressen to focus more on product development and production processes in its initial operational phases by providing a ready customer base, establish farm-supply relationships, and assist with the share purchase and distribution process.

[2]Saueressen may further supplement farm baskets as its standalone operations continue to develop into a multi-farm standalone CSF model.

[3]Share purchase cut-off date depends on the planning and production schedules of participating farms

Next Steps for Local Fermented Foods

Saueressen seeks Founding Farm Partnerships to develop small-scale proofs of concept for the Community-Supported Ferments (CSF) business models before beginning full-scale production.

Priority One: CSA Integration

A collaborative process to integrate fermented foods into a CSA might happen as follows:

- Conduct inventory of ingredients available through the current farm production
- Identify desired outcomes for farmers or farm shareholders
- Produce ingredients and design recipes
- Optional public testing phase and adjustments
- Enter initial production phase; modify recipes as necessary

Priority Two: Standalone CSF

A collaborative process with non-CSA local farms might include development and production of recipes for direct-sale farm stand products, and contribution of essential ingredients for Saueressen as it develops its market niche.

Recipes

Working with farm-fresh foods requires significant flexibility and creativity in recipe development and scaling on short notice. Saueressen artisans rise to that challenge by applying solutions uniquely suited to each batch of farm product. Saueressen has developed a base flavor and work-flow applicable to most common lactic acid fermentation processes by synthesizing sauerkraut and kimchi production processes. The resulting product has unique flavor and significant nutrition while enhancing its culinary flexibility, neutrality and accessibility, especially for first-time customers of fermented foods.

Vertical Integration

Saueressen may consult or contract with farmers who have appropriate on-site facilities, space and interest in producing their own value-added, co-branded fermented foods. Consultation includes work flow, equipment and materials through the first season of production and ongoing technical assistance.

Further Discussion

Examples

Marketing synergy: Fermentation artisans help provide local food customers with increased product diversity and selection, while local farmers help provide fermented food customers with local, transparent and sustainable alternatives to the industrial food system.

Integrated work-flow: As whole foods, fermented foods benefit from knowledge of culinary application the same as raw or fresh foods. CSA operations often provide recipe and usage ideas for their shareholders, making them ideal collaborators and mentors.

Complete quality control: Artisans and farmers may work together to develop and plant ideal ingredients for the production of fermented foods, further increasing the value of the end products.

Fermentation adds value to many farm foods

- Many foods have associated fermentation processes to extend or enhance their value.
- Local farmers already grow many top priority foods, such as *cabbages and other brassicas; garlic, onion and other root crops (parsnips and carrots; beets; radishes), some fruits (cucumbers, immature radish seedpods, etc)* and animal products.

Top priority foods: Saueressen targets foods where fermentation enhances safety and viability as well as nutrition, value and more. For example, lactic acid fermentation of fruits and vegetables extends and enhances their viability for months or even years. Likewise, unfermented dairy products contain sugars and proteins that most people find difficult to digest in even modest quantities. Yogurt, kefir and aged, ripened cheese fermentations transform such sugars and proteins into more easily-digestible, nutritious forms while extending the shelf-life and safety of the food.

Second priority foods: Saueressen gives second priority to non-perishable, inherently shelf-stable farm products where fermentation primarily enhances nutrition and value, including most seed crops such as grains and legumes. For example, soaking, sprouting or fermenting most seed crops reduces the prevalence of mildly toxic phytates (phytic acids) and other anti-nutrients while creating additional nutritional value and culinary appeal.

Criteria for considering local priority foods

- *Perishable:* Fermentation can preserve or even enhance the safety and nutritional value of foods that
  - deteriorate rapidly under storage or
  - have a narrow range of safe or optimal short- or medium-term storage conditions.
- *Seasonal availability:* Fermentation of the food provides an important winter source of micro- or macro-nutrients, including vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and other phytochemicals.
- *Appropriate composition:* Contains sugars, starches or other carbohydrates for primary fermentation (fats and proteins usually ferment as part of a secondary process).
- *Sensory appeal:* Fermentation process preserves or enhances flavors, aromas, textures (depends largely on consumer expectations in relation to product development and marketing goals).
- *Market value:* Fermentation contributes significantly to the economic impact of the food.

Quantities to grow

Consider that 4-6 medium napa or headed cabbages will produce approximately one gallon of fermented cabbage. Typical packaging includes pints and quarts, or larger for wholesale applications. Volumes depend largely on how the artisan processes the food prior to fermentation. For example, shredding, brining and pounding all drastically increase the amount of food contained in a given fermentation volume. Sliced cucumber chips take up less space than cucumber spears. Whole cucumbers take up the most space in a fermentation vessel.

About Ethan Young

Ethan Young is the founder of Saueressen. He has lived his entire life in the Willamette Valley, and started organic gardening alongside his parents before he could walk. From this experience sprang interests in food justice, food security, food sovereignty, and preservation and preparation using appropriate technologies. As a result, he has spent half his life developing culinary and fermentation experience with whole, local fresh foods, and works as an advocate and activist for local food system development. He co-founded the Salem Food Cooperative, and developed a yogurt culture in the year 1999 that he considers part of his family.