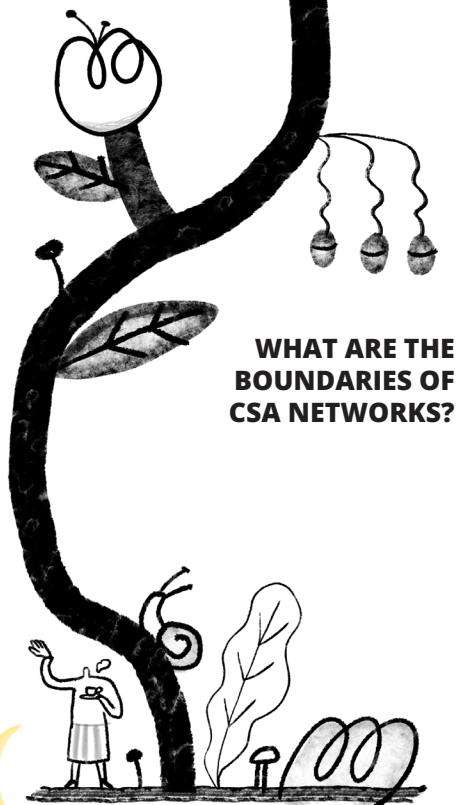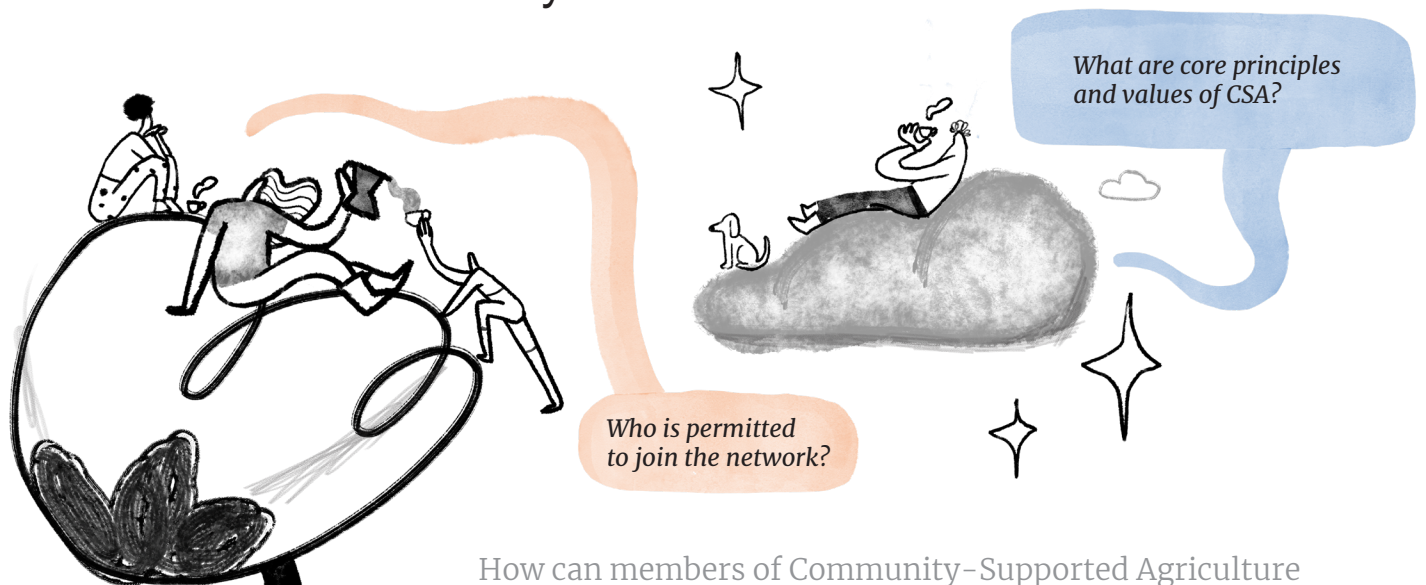# DRAWING BOUNDARIES

**How Community Supported Agriculture networks can position themselves by creating, maintaining and enforcing a shared collective identity**

*What are core principles and values of CSA?*

*Who is permitted to join the network?*

How can members of Community–Supported Agriculture (CSA) networks collectively negotiate and define a shared identity? Why does this matter? This short document is an introduction into the idea that CSA networks have boundaries by defining their own identity. It provides reflections on how such boundaries can be created, maintained and enforced over time to position the network strategically and to support its own internal development.

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**WHAT ARE THE BOUNDARIES OF CSA NETWORKS?**

National networks of CSA initiatives need to continually negotiate and define their common identity. For example, they need to decide who is permitted to join the network and who is not, and on what basis. They also need to identify the principles and values that unite them, as well as ways to ensure that individual initiatives adhere to those principles and values.

We call this the network's **boundaries**: the invisible contours of the network's identity which determine how the network relates to other organizations, and how it distinguishes itself from them and from the context more generally.

A network's boundaries are not fixed forever. They tend to change over time, amongst others due to the natural turnover of members who bring in various ideas and political agendas. Boundaries are formed and changed in a

*How can we ensure compliance with our core values and principles?*

never-ending process that includes crucial moments of (often deliberative) decision-making—for instance, collective decision making regarding inclusion criteria and expulsion rules. They are also formed and changed through a network's more subtle, everyday operations— as exemplified through network members' language, i.e. how they talk about CSA.

*Boundaries: the invisible contours of the network's identity which determine how the network relates to and distinguishes itself from other organizations*

Finally, CSA networks may decide to adopt broad or narrow definition of their boundary. Either option has advantages and disadvantages: a broad definition can ensure diversity and the inclusion of its members, while a narrow definition can safeguard ideological purity. Each network needs to identify its own balance between broad and narrow boundaries, taking into consideration its political context, and the priorities in its own development.

**WHY DO BOUNDARIES MATTER FOR CSA NETWORKS?**

Boundaries are important because national CSA networks need to position themselves within their political context. They face an almost constant risk of being co-opted by market actors (for example, supermarket chains claiming support to local, fair, and/or organic produce). CSA networks also face unfavourable policies (for instance, around access to land and subsidies) and competition from other civil society organizations. Well-defined boundaries help to mitigate the risk of co-optation, for example through making it clear which initiatives can present themselves under the banner of CSA, and which cannot. There are also several other advantages. Boundaries make it easier for network members to collaborate by marking and reinforcing solidarity

*Boundaries help to identify strategic direction towards potential adversaries as well as allies, and contribute to project a unitary image.*

and social connections. They also help identify strategic direction towards potential adversaries (for example, food retail and supermarket chains) as well as potential allies (for example, other civil society organizations concerned with sustainable agriculture), and contribute to project a unitary image.

**NOT A LINEAR PROCESS**

Creating, maintaining and enforcing the boundaries of a CSA network is not a linear, straightforward process. It is a process that requires continuous questioning, challenging and reconsideration of existing boundaries. In turn, this implies a willingness and ability to activate internal processes of self-reflection, despite potential frictions and even conflict that this may generate within the network.

CREATING THE BOUNDARIES

- Defining who we are (not).
- Negotiating core principles and values.
- Adopting a shared definition of CSA.

MANTAINING THE BOUNDARIES

- Defining entry and participation requirements.
- Adopting a language reflecting core principles and values.
- Communicating who we are to others.

CSA NETWORK

- Organizing for monitoring adherence to core principles and values.
- Protecting visual identity, name and other marks of identity.
- Expelling and refusing non-compliant members.

ENFORCING THE BOUNDARIES

**QUESTIONS FOR COLLECTIVE DISCUSSION**

These are some questions that CSA networks can ask themselves while thinking about the network's boundaries.

**CREATING THE BOUNDARIES**

- What are our core principles and values? What is our common denominator?
- Who are we (not)?
- Who or what do we struggle against?
- What does CSA mean to us? What definition of CSA do we apply? How is CSA defined in other contexts/countries?
- Do we want to adopt a narrow or a broad definition? What are the (dis-)advantages of either option?

**MANTAINING THE BOUNDARIES**

- How are we organized? Who is permitted to join our network, and who is refused access, and on what basis?
- How do we communicate who we are?
- What terms and languages do we use to speak about members and producers, activities, visions, etc.?

**ENFORCING THE BOUNDARIES**

- (How) is the compliance of individual initiatives with our [the network's] core values and principles enforced? Is there a legal basis for this enforcement, e.g. by anchoring the core values and principles in the network's statue? Who is responsible for this enforcement? Is this realistic, given our current resources?
- What are other viable tools for ensuring compliance with our values? Can, for example, participatory guarantee system serve this purpose?
- Who is allowed to use our name and visual identity (e.g., logo), and under what conditions? For what reason do we wish to protect them?

**CREDITS**

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