

Required	Meals #	Meals Success	Cohesive Community	Best Things	Worst Things	Other Comments
No	<1	6.5	7.5	Generally good food, no pressure to participate, enough people willing to cook at this frequency.	Sometimes it takes a lot of cajoling to get people to clean up. But we discussed that Wed in our monthly community meeting and I think it's going to get better. Bunch of people have signed up for tonight's 'pop up' snow dinner. I had initially thought and hoped we'd eat together more often. Now I think it's just the right amount	We have a breakfast once a month before our monthly work day, dinner before monthly community meeting, dinner (usually—not always) before monthly documentary film, holiday dinners/potlucks, dinners because someone feels like making it happen. Sometimes potlucks because someone organizes it. BYO "Drinks (and snacks) on the Patio" Fridays after work when the weather is good and someone wants to organize it. We've never considered making meals mandatory. However, we do make community labor mandatory: 4 hours/month or be billed \$15/hour on your monthly HOA bill. We've found that the money in lieu of labor has helped us keep HOA dues lower than they might be.
No						Here at Cobb Hill cohousing...Hartland Vermont, all Common meals are volunteer. If no one signs up we have a potluck. The sentiment here is that if you have to make things mandatory you don't really have a trusting participatory community. It works...we have lovely meals and some people never cook...but they don't cook at home either. It works...we don't waste energy worrying about it. We don't keep track of anything work wise and we trust that people will do what they can. A few slackers but they are the ones missing out on the connections.
No	2 - 3	8	5	The fact that we have 2-3 a week, more than the average coho.	At about one meal out of four, the cook, asst cook, or one or more of the 3-person cleanup crew cancels on less than a day's notice and we have to scramble to find someone to do it. About 1 in 10 of our common meals is canceled due to this.	Despite cook, asst. cook, and cleanup jobs being voluntary, we usually have enough volunteers to make it work. Remarkably, we have had more trouble finding people for cleanup than for cook and asst. cook.
No	2	8.5	varies	Most people who live here full time come to Thursday cooked dinner fairly regularly. We have a solid core of good cooks. We enjoy eating together. We have an efficient online signup system for paying and for helping with meals.	Some people are shy about or too time crunched to cook. Nothing is terrible.	Good luck. Number ratings don't describe the experiences.
Yes	2	9	8	quality of meals and level of participation	not much, one guy is late pretty regularly when he cooks	I visited another 13 household sized cohousing in Aptos, CA. this summer. I was fascinated to discover they have NO BOOKKEEPING for meals. All are expected to participate and do (except one person) and they all just rotate and no money changes hands - even on paper. The elegance of simplicity.
No	2	8.5	6	Enthusiastic diners, who are typically about half our community of 60. (The other half, based on my survey, indicate they either don't have time due to work and children, or have restrictive diets, or don't like eating with large noisy groups) A small core of excellent cooks who cook on average of once a month- very good meals, some simple and some more like an ethnic restaurant affordable (\$5 per meal, less for kids, of which \$1 goes to the pantry and up to \$4 for the cook to spend) a large garden that produces tons of vegetables and fruits during the summer for fresh consumption with strong leadership, an improving system of food preservation, mostly fruit, that gets used for our meals a very nice kitchen and large dining hall that is easy to flex from dining room to meeting room to activity room efficient method of sign up for cooks, diners and cleaners online	Post-meal clean up can be a problem. We ask 3 people to sign up to clean, but often there is only one and we have to beg at the time of the meal. Cleaners do get first dibs at leftovers if there are any. Cooks have even threatened to cancel meals due to lack of cleaners, but I don't think it has happened yet. Some people are unhappy that we don't provide meals that are strictly vegetarian and organic, and others are unhappy that we serve gluten and dairy products. Some people wanted no sugar or desserts. I did several surveys to determine how the majority felt, however, and the majority wanted both meat and vegetarian meals and didn't care about gluten or dairy and didn't require 100% organic and did want dessert. For \$4 per meal, it's not really possible to meet all these unique needs, so I have encouraged cooks to prepare a variety of choices when possible and clearly indicate what's available when the meal is advertised online.	I do agree with most national folks who say that common meals are critical to communities. When I was elected meals pod leader I heard about lots of conflict around the meals program earlier because it was decision by consensus. Our community has shifted from the typical consensus model to "sociocracy" (very interesting!) which has allowed me to be a strong, efficient leader of the meals program who must and does garner lots of input, participation, enthusiasm, and transparency. Really the only thorn has been clean up, which seems to go in stages, sometimes a problem and sometimes not.  You probably know that some communities REQUIRE meals participation (e.g. The Commons on the Alameda in Santa Fe) whether people eat the meals or not. The Commons system works well, requiring that everyone must put in at least 2 hours per month helping with cooking or cleaning or serving.
No	2	7	7	High quality local organic food, well made, at low cost; friendly company. Almost everyone pitches in for an efficient clean up.	Now and then there is a period with lots of local events, or many people out of town, when potluck in particular is less well attended.	Of the 16 or so households who participate in community work and play, about 2/3 show up for meals, especially the cooked meals. We charge \$4.50 for a meal that would cost that for the dessert alone, if eaten out. It would be totally out of character for us to require meal prep participation. Everything we do is voluntary. Some participation in the community is expected, but there is no expectation that cooking is done by everyone.
Yes	2.5	8	7	Fosters community bonds	As cook I find it difficult to provide for the many ideosyncratic food sensitivities, and suspect that many of the "allergies" may be merely fads, preferences, or diets. As a diner I expect (but often do not get) a balanced nutritious meal with protein, vegetables and carbs in appropriate proportions.	For some of us common meals are a lifeline, others are not interested at all. We have learned to accept that we are very diverse in many ways. Everybody participates in community work and decision making, but in very different amounts. Some strive for much more "spirit of cohousing" while others consider our community a neighborhood. Mandatory common meals would never be consented.
No	2	9	9	Consistency! 22 years, 2 x a week.	When I am head cook and it feels daunting. Once I start it is not bad at all.	
No	1.25	10	8	Great food. We keep no records and pay no money. If you are a cook, you are on a team of 4 and you pay for the food you buy. Then all your meals are free.	We have a temporary common house and it is being strained to the limit as our meal participation grows. But we are finding better ways to provide more seating and trying different ways to serve the food. It works really well.	We wish more people would participate in the meals. Out 16 homes, almost all have some people who participate. The people who do not participate are mostly the renters.
No	2	6	7	Camaraderie, having fun discussions.	Lack of greater participation. Also, not everyone takes the time to cook something for the potlucks, which leads to some pretty funky meals sometimes.	
No	1 - 2	7	7	Everyone who attends has a great time. Love our Mosaic software that allows people to sign up for prep and cleaning. Never a shortage of helping hands.	The only thing I don't like is that many people show up just for a cheap meal, and then they dump their dishes in the soap lug and leave without thanking the chef. The appreciation vacuum has left the better cooks in the community uninspired to participate. Also, some people don't treat the kitchen well—burn pots, put pots away greasy, leave crumbs or food out.	
No	3	9	7 or 4	Great food, community building, I don't have to cook.	Some concern that we have to cancel about 1 a month with not enough volunteers. Also goal 6 years ago was 4 per week.	We are 6 years past move-in.
No	4 - 5	10	9	I think common meals are critical to keeping our community strong, especially now that we are 10 years old. If you never come to meals, I hardly know you even if you live in my community. I also feel I eat better and more diversely because of the meal system.	None	I think many communities are confused about the many benefits of having more meals/week. For instance, because we have so many meals, the meals have fewer diners at any given meal which makes them much easier to cook for. We are 34 homes. Also it appears that many communities get hung up on the accounting. We have a nifty software program that makes it easy to post a menu, sign up for meals, and does all the accounting. I think that the best hope to getting such software more broadly available is to get the guy in Sonora Coho that has been working on a community software package to include meal sign up/accounting piece in it.
No	1	7.5	7.5	fellowship & good food	too few people participate (cooks, cleaners or diners)	
No	3	5	5	Great food	Not enough of them because not enough people sign up to prepare them.	Some people never participate to prepare meals, clean up, or eat Some people are regulars at the pizza/pot luck but not the other meals Some people are regular eaters but never, or hardly ever prepare a meal Some people are regular preparers and eaters We have about 60 people; most meals have about 20 (give or take 5); Sometimes a special meal will get 40; Out dining room has six tables each seating eight. Our dining room is very noisy and that keeps some people away. We're trying DG. maybe that will work better.
No	2	6 - 10	6	socializing with neighbors, very different cuisines as we have members from different cultures	difficult to meet the needs of parents with small children	I have lived at Cascadia Commons in Portland for 15 yrs and we have tried different systems and have been successful with current system for the last many years.