

COOKING GREEN

CSAs - Sustainably Grown Fresh Produce

by Kay Bushnell

One by one they arrive carrying an empty bushel basket, which they stack neatly on top of other empty baskets. Waiting for them are about twenty identical baskets filled with the day's harvest of vegetables.

Each person who picks up a basket of fresh produce is a shareholder in a Community Sustainable Agriculture (CSA) project. CSAs have sprung up throughout the United States to help small-scale and family farmers to survive. Participants in a CSA purchase a portion of a farm's harvest up-front. The farm benefits by receiving money at the beginning of the season when expenses are greatest. The shareholders benefit by receiving fresh, usually organic food from the garden they helped to fund. Farms that participate in CSA programs are often accredited organic farms.

Several shareholders in one CSA express their enthusiasm for the program. Shareholder Elizabeth Lorenz says that her participation in a CSA has made her more aware of how pests, deer, and weather affect a gardening venture. She keeps abreast of these factors and the seasonal aspects of the farm's production by reading the CSA's newsletter.

Marianna Keller, another shareholder, finds that involving her children in the project has expanded their dietary horizons. She has taken her eight year old twins to garden at the farm, where they made burritos by stuffing a lettuce leaf with broccoli, carrots, beans, and "ate it on the spot". Keller sometimes brings her twins when she picks up her weekly basket. She says, "I bring them when they're hungry. Once they polished off a whole head of cauliflower by the time we got home." Keller feels that visiting her CSA farm's garden and feasting on the weekly harvest has another positive effect on her children: "It helps kids to fall in love with nature."

Margalynne Armstrong was inspired to become a shareholder and to support organic gardening after hearing Dolores Huerta, cofounder with Cesar Chavez of United Farm Workers of America, say that one of the biggest issues for farm workers is pesticide exposure. Armstrong says, "This way I help keep pesticides away from farm workers and out of my family's food."

Although shareholders are not required to work in their CSA's garden many enjoy doing so. Ed Hale says that he enjoys his volunteer gardening at the farm. He feels that an important part of a CSA's environmental education program is to involve those who eat the food in growing it.

For more information on CSAs and how to find a CSA near you contact: 1) Regional Farm & Food Project (518) 427-6537, email: farmfood@capital; 2) CSA database,

www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/csa; 3) Just Food, www.justfood.org; (212) 645-9880 4) Local Harvest, www.localharvest.org; 5) Robin Van En Center, www.csacenter.org, (717) 261-2880.