

**Fresh From The Field, Good for the Earth and Us**  
**CSAs: Part I**  
**By Kay Bushnell**

Susan Osofsky is a leader of Inner City Outings for the San Francisco Bay Chapter of the Sierra Club as well as a member of the Loma Prieta Chapter. She is committed to promoting sustainable food and agriculture. Her home in Palo Alto is one of the drop-off locations for the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) project of Two Small Farms and is where some subscribers to the CSA pick up their boxes of fresh-picked produce each week. Two Small Farms is one of several local, organic farms that deliver produce to homes and offices in addition to selling it at farmers' markets.

I accept Susan's invitation to stop by on the day the boxes of food from Two Small Farms are delivered to her home. As I approach her home I see 41 boxes stacked neatly on her front porch. Soon subscribers to the CSA begin to come and go, deftly removing the inner bundle of produce from their boxes and flattening the boxes so that they can be returned to the farm and used again. It is an efficient process. Osofsky enjoys exchanging friendly greetings with the visitors.

The CSA concept evolved from a program started by a group of women in Japan to "put the farmer's face on food." CSAs began in the United States in 1985. The number of subscribers has steadily increased. By Jan. 2005 there were 1500 CSA farms in the U.S. and Canada. Debbie Palmer, CSA Coordinator of nearby Live Earth Farm's CSA, says that this year Live Earth Farm's subscriptions filled up completely before the season began and that many people have already signed up for next year.

Local Harvest ([www.localharvest.org](http://www.localharvest.org)) describes CSAs as an "innovative, resourceful strategy to connect local farmers with local consumers." A farm and a community of supporters make a mutual commitment that provides the farm with money to pay for the farmer's expenses such as seed, water, fertilizer, equipment maintenance, labor, etc. In return the subscribers (consumers) purchase a share of the seasons' harvest, which is delivered weekly throughout the growing season directly to a customer's home, office or a nearby drop-off location. Customers can pay for their shares either in one lump sum for the season before seeds are sown in early spring or in quarterly or monthly installments. In our area CSAs operate either year 'round, with time off in mid-winter, or from March to November.

Because the food from a CSA is seasonal and the farms are close by, less fossil fuel is needed to transport the CSA's produce to consumers than for produce in supermarkets. CSA farms are free of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and genetic engineering. Typically, a healthy diversity of crops grows on CSA farms, many of them small and family operated, a contrast to the monoculture of large corporate farms.

Recent reports of contaminated food from other countries have motivated many consumers to seek food from local sources. According to *Business Week* magazine, Liu

Lei, head of a group of organic farmers in China called Yunnan Association of Green Development, said, “You have a lot of small companies [in China] taking produce grown with pesticides and chemical fertilizers and then selling it as organic.” The need to document the provenance of globally sourced food has spurred the development of sophisticated markers and software to trace the entire path of ingredients and products from fields and factories to store shelves. In contrast, customers of CSAs know where their produce comes from. Rather than wondering about imported food, they can even visit their CSA farms and see their food growing in the fields.

Consumers purchase a CSA farm’s harvest in “shares.” One regular sized share is generally designed to meet the weekly vegetable needs for a family of four. Some CSAs offer shares of different sizes and a range of prices. The cost per share ranges from \$15 to \$40 per week depending on the size of the share. Most people pay about \$20-\$30 per week. Osofsky points out, “Price-wise we get a fabulous deal.... the supermarket doesn’t have food that’s as fresh as what we get at the CSA.... you’re really comparing how much one pays for 7 day old (on average) [supermarket] food vs. 1 day old [CSA] food.” Several CSAs offer “an “extra fruit share” and a “flower share” for modest additional fees.

CSAs tend to be flexible when customers need to miss weeks. Some CSAs offer customers the option of applying the fee for the missed week to next month’s bill or donating their share to a charitable cause. For example, Full Belly Farm’s CSA donates extra or unused food to a clinic for low-income women with cancer.

Arvind Kumar, who writes the “Gardening Green” column in the *Loma Prieta*, has been a member of a CSA (Two Small Farms) for five years. He likes the idea of making a commitment to a local farm and says, “We wanted 100% of our shopping dollars to go to the farmer instead of only 7c on the dollar.” He lauds the “great taste” of CSA vegetables that he says reminds him of the quality of vegetables in India that were freshly picked every day.

The many colors of vegetables and fruits grown by CSAs are significant for more than their visual appeal. Dietitians recommend that we choose vegetables and fruits in a wide variety of colors in order to consume a variety of beneficial phytonutrients (plant nutrients). Phytonutrients are compounds that contribute to a healthy immune system. They are found only in plants. There are no phytonutrients in meat, fish, dairy, or eggs. Subscribing to a CSA is an easy way to increase one’s consumption of fresh vegetables and fruits and enjoy the transition to a health-supporting, sustainable, all plant-based diet.

The following web sites for CSAs that deliver to the mid-Peninsula and the South Bay Area contain detailed information about the CSAs’ produce, prices, and delivery options.

Eating with the Seasons [www.eatwiththeseasons.com](http://www.eatwiththeseasons.com) or 831-245-8125

Farm Fresh to You [www.farmfresh toyou.com](http://www.farmfresh toyou.com) or 1-800-796-6009

Full Belly Farm [www.fullbellyfarm.com](http://www.fullbellyfarm.com) or 530-796-2214

Hidden Villa Farm [www.hiddenvilla.org](http://www.hiddenvilla.org) 650-949-8647

Live Earth Farm [www.liveearthfarm.com](http://www.liveearthfarm.com) or 831-763-2448

Two Small Farms [www.twosmallfarms.com](http://www.twosmallfarms.com) or 831-786-0625