

Taste the Difference, Say Subscribers CSAs (Part 2 of 2)

By Kay Bushnell

Elisabeth Pirrotta of Palo Alto is delighted with the flavor of her CSA's (Two Small Farms) fresh produce. "Everything in the box is so fresh and flavorful ... you don't need sauces," she exclaims. From all reports the produce delivered by local Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms to their customers is no ordinary produce. Participants rave about its high quality, fresh taste, and the fact that it is organically grown using sustainable methods that benefit the land. For a moderate subscription fee CSA farms harvest their crops that are in season and deliver them directly to their subscribers' homes, offices, or nearby drop-off sites.

One of the major advantages of participating in a CSA is that the weekly deliveries save time. Being surrounded by a tempting array of produce at a farmers market or other market can be an exhilarating experience, but visiting the market and choosing among such enticing abundance does take time. Some CSAs email a list of available produce several days before delivery, and customers can order from the list. In the case of other CSAs you don't get to choose, but you don't *have* to, either. You receive a surprise—whatever has become deliciously ripe that week. Wendee Crofoot, Office Manager of Committee for Green Foothills, signed up with Eating With the Seasons. "I'll give it a try," she thought at the time. Now she says, "I love it! It saves lots of time." Crofoot likes planning her meals around whatever fresh produce is delivered and finds that her CSA's "extra small" share is the perfect size for her.

A typical weekly delivery in spring from Full Belly Farm might include carrots, broccoli, red kale, 1/2 lb. of salad mix, green cabbage, beets, garlic, potatoes, fresh basil, strawberries, and asparagus. In June a share from Farm Fresh to You consisted of kale, carrots, cherry tomatoes, summer squash, peaches, green beans, nectarines, and beets.

Maureen McCormick, a Sierra Club member and a seven-year subscriber to Full Belly Farm's CSA, applauds the farm's dedication to educating people about agriculture and the land. Since she joined a CSA her family of two adults and two pre-teens is consuming more vegetables and a greater variety of them. It is not unusual for their meals to include several steamed vegetables and a salad, says McCormick. "With a steady stream of vegetables coming into the house you can't ignore them. You *do* have to make a commitment to cook them," she adds. McCormick often uses the recipes published in the CSA's newsletter that comes in the box from the farm.

Susan Osofsky, a subscriber to Two Small Farms' CSA and a member of the Loma Prieta Chapter, puts a positive spin on having an abundant amount of fresh produce in one's kitchen: "...it forces [people] to eat better because they cook at home every week." Pirrotta, also subscribes to Two Small Farms' CSA. She finds that the generous volume of food arriving each week encourages her family of two adults and two children to eat

more veggies during the nine months of CSA deliveries than in the three winter months when she has to shop for produce.

Sierran Eva Heninwolf has subscribed to Fully Belly Farm's CSA for 10 years. "It [CSA produce] has vastly increased my [cooking] repertoire, especially the greens," she says. Heninwolf explains that red Russian kale has become one of her favorite vegetables. On Saturdays Heninwolf stops by the Palo Alto Farmer's Market to pick up her weekly CSA box at Full Belly Farm's stand. The weekly trip gives her the opportunity to purchase additional organic items such as nuts, beans, flour, and flowers that Full Belly Farm sells there.

Several other farms also offer their produce at both farmers' markets and through a CSA program. . Hidden Villa has a stand at the Los Altos farmers' market. Full Belly Farm, Two Small Farms, and Farm Fresh to You are also vendors at farmers' markets. In addition to its CSA and its booth at farmers' markets, Farm Fresh to You sells its organic produce in a shop at the Ferry Building in San Francisco, which is where many people first learn about Farm Fresh to You's CSA.

Current CSA subscribers offer tips to potential CSA members. "Try it out and taste the difference," enthuses *Loma Prieta* columnist Arvind Kumar. He feels that the twenty dollars a week he spends to feed 3.5 vegetarians is a bargain. The twenty dollars that Pirrotta spends weekly for her CSA deliveries sometimes supply her with more vegetables than she can use. "Have someone to give the extra to and plan to prepare at least one of the items a day," she suggests. Sierran Susan Osofsky urges newcomers to subscribe to the four-week trial offered by some CSAs "...to see whether or not you want to continue."

All agree that a CSA subscription is a wonderful way to increase one's consumption of locally grown vegetables and fruits and to ease the transition to a truly sustainable, all plant-based diet.

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

Eating with the Seasons www.eatwiththeseasons.com or 831-245-8125

Farm Fresh to You www.farmfresh toyou.com or 1-800-796-6009

Full Belly Farm www.fullbellyfarm.com or 530-796-2214

Hidden Villa Farm www.hiddenvilla.org or 650-949-8647

Live Earth Farm www.liveearthfarm.com or 831-763-2448

Two Small Farms www.twosmallfarms.com or 831-786-0625

For a list of CSAs throughout the United States visit www.localharvest.org/csa/