

What is Community Supported Agriculture and How Does It Work?

CSA reflects an innovative and resourceful strategy to connect local farmers with local consumers; develop a regional food supply and strong local economy; maintain a sense of community; encourage land stewardship; and honor the knowledge and experience of growers and producers working with small to medium farms. CSA is a unique model of local agriculture whose roots reach back 30 years to Japan where a group of women concerned about the increase in food imports and the corresponding decrease in the farming population initiated a direct growing and purchasing relationship between their group and local farms. This arrangement, called "teikei" in Japanese, translates to "putting the farmers' face on food." This concept traveled to Europe and was adapted to the U.S. and given the name "Community Supported Agriculture" at Indian Line Farm, Massachusetts, in 1985. As of January 2005, there are over 1500 CSA farms across the US and Canada.

CSA is a partnership of mutual commitment between a farm and a community of supporters which provides a direct link between the production and consumption of food. Supporters cover a farm's yearly operating budget by purchasing a share of the season's harvest. CSA members make a commitment to support the farm throughout the season, and assume the costs, risks and bounty of growing food along with the farmer or grower. Members help pay for seeds, fertilizer, water, equipment maintenance, labor, etc. In return, the farm provides, to the best of its ability, a healthy supply of seasonal fresh produce throughout the growing season. Becoming a member creates a responsible relationship between people and the food they eat, the land on which it is grown and those who grow it.

This mutually supportive relationship between local farmers, growers and community members helps create an economically stable farm operation in which members are assured the highest quality produce, often at below retail prices. In return, farmers and growers are guaranteed a reliable market for a diverse selection of crops.

Why Is Community Supported Agriculture Important?

- CSA's direct marketing gives farmers and growers the fairest return on their products.
- CSA keeps food dollars in the local community and contributes to the maintenance and establishment of regional food production.
- CSA encourages communication and cooperation among farmers.
- With a "guaranteed market" for their produce, farmers can invest their time in doing the best job they can rather than looking for buyers.
- CSA supports the biodiversity of a given area and the diversity of agriculture through the preservation of small farms producing a wide variety of crops.
- CSA creates opportunity for dialogue between farmers and consumers.
- CSA creates a sense of social responsibility and stewardship of local land.
- CSA puts "the farmers face on food" and increases understanding of how, where, and by whom our food is grown.