



MEDIA RELEASE

TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
MARKET DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

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“CSA” MEANS YOU’VE “BOUGHT THE FARM” -- IN A GOOD WAY

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – The phrase “Community Supported Agriculture” describes a business model through which a non-farmer purchases a “share” or “half-share” of a real farmer’s harvest – often before the crops are even planted.

The phrase may be awkward, but choosing local, homegrown foods is a national trend, and CSAs are gaining ground with both food producers and the food eaters who don’t have farms, but wish they could eat as if they did.

“If you join a CSA, you pay the farmer up front, before the growing season begins, which allows the farmer to pay for the seed, fuel, and other inputs necessary to farm for the year,” says Jon Frady, marketing specialist with the Tennessee Department of Agriculture. “When crops start coming in, your fresh, local food is already bought and paid for.” This direct growing and purchasing relationship gives producers a stable income and the fairest return on their products, according to Frady. Also worthy of mention is that CSAs keep food dollars – and the beautiful farmlands where they’re produced – in the community.

“Typically,” says the marketing specialist, “the cost for a full share averages about \$25 a week, but what constitutes a share depends on what the particular farm produces. The farmer usually provides a weekly half-bushel box of produce for a full share or a bi-weekly box for a half share at a convenient pick-up spot in the customer’s area.”

A spring-summer CSA share typically lasts about 25 weeks, from late May until early November, according to Frady.

“It’s increasingly typical for customers to be able to request farm fresh eggs, meats and other local foods to be included with their share,” says Frady. “Even if the farmer doesn’t produce all those products, several neighboring producers may pool their diverse products to give customers a complete range of local foods.”

Close personal relationships between farmers and their “business partners” often result, says Frady.

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"Several years back, I had a couple who came to pick up their basket immediately following their wedding," says Adrienne Gibson, farmer at "A Place of the Heart Farm" in Pioneer. "They came with their entire wedding party. We took a group picture."

"My customers are from all walks of life," says Gibson, "but they all have the common thread of wanting making a positive difference in how they feed their families.

"As a farmer, I really love the excitement from my customers when they receive their baskets. I also love when people's interest carries them to coming and visiting the farm, and participating in the things we have going on here."

Tennessee CSAs are accepting customers now. Frady says that those who are joining a CSA for the first time should have a plan for ways to use the excess fruits and vegetables that will surely arrive in their baskets. The specialist notes that guilt over wasted food is the biggest problem cited by CSA customers. Having some freezer space cleared, freezer bags on hand and some new recipes to try help assure that a typical summer's abundance is a blessing, not a trial.

A directory of CSAs is available at www.picktnproducts.org.

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