



MEDIA RELEASE

TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
MARKET DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

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A Bushel Full of Good Reasons to Join a CSA

NASHVILLE - There's a whole bushel of good reasons to participate in "community supported agriculture," a business model through which customers purchase a "share" or "half-share" of a farmer's harvest, often before crops are even planted. The phrase may be awkward, but choosing local, homegrown foods is a national trend, and CSAs are gaining ground.

Paying the farmer before the growing season begins allows the farmer to buy seed, fuel, and other inputs necessary to grow crops for the year. As crops ripen, 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. That's a great benefit for the farmers, but the concept benefits CSA members at least as much.

First, locally grown fruits and vegetables have an unbeatable edge in nutritional value and flavor. When a fruit or vegetable is harvested, it immediately begins losing vitamin content. Getting veggies picked from their plants only hours before delivery ensures the consumer gets the best quality possible. CSA memberships can also be cost efficient, with no middleman taking a cut of the profits, and foods cooked at home are also less costly than pre-prepared foods. Those home cooked meals come without the preservatives, artificial colors and flavorings prevalent in processed foods, along with sugars and fats that detract from the benefits of eating fruits and vegetables.

CSA share boxes come stocked with whatever is currently in the garden – including produce that might never have been experienced, otherwise. This wider variety of produce translates to a broader nutritional base, plus a whole new range of recipes and tastes, avoiding the boredom that can come from eating only a few vegetables over and over.

In fact, committing to a CSA generally results in more fruits and vegetables being worked into the consumers daily diet. A bin of fresh produce is always waiting to be used, and to avoid wasting the food, CSA participants end up making and eating more meals heavy with produce.

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Finally, buying from a local farm ensures that food doesn't travel the average 1,500 miles of most grocery store food, shrinking the carbon footprint of food production and rewarding local farmers for their good growing practices.

A spring-summer CSA share typically lasts about 25 weeks, from late May until early November. CSA farms usually provide a weekly half-bushel box of produce for a full share, or one box every two weeks for a half share. The boxes are picked up at convenient locations in the customer's area. 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. Even if one farmer doesn't produce all those products, several neighboring producers may pool their diverse products to give customers a complete range of local foods.

A directory of local CSAs is available at www.picktnproducts.org. To learn more about local CSAs, farms and farmers markets, or for recipes featuring local products, visit www.picktnproducts.org. Follow Pick Tennessee Products on Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest.

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