Choosing Your CSA Farm Share

Community Supported Agriculture in Ann Arbor

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http://thefarmersmarketer.com
Choosing Your CSA Farm Share: Seven Selection Criteria (and an additional consideration)

Calling all food patriots: “Oh, Say Can You CSA” might be the new national anthem for what’s being called the Good Food Revolution. For people who want to eat food that is good for them and good for the planet, the most direct route is to get your food directly from a farmer you know and trust.

In case you haven’t heard of it before, Community Supported Agriculture or a (CSA) farm share is generally a weekly allotment, or share, of vegetables in season (usually May-October) from a local farm, for which you pay in advance. At a practical level, you’re giving a farmer a vote of confidence and some security with startup capital. In return, you get a discount on your produce. Together you share the risks and rewards of the season.

Once you’ve signed on to your farm membership, what you can usually expect is to have a certain day each week (which you will know in advance) where you’ll go pick up a box of fresh, seasonal produce. For example, many of our local CSAs bring their members’ shares to the Ann Arbor Farmers Market on Saturdays. You just need to remember to get there before the farmer packs up and goes home! Most of the CSAs will give you (or email you) a newsletter to let you know what’s in the box, and may include recipes and upcoming events.

Over the past few years there has been an amazing proliferation in the number and kinds of CSA farm shares that are available to the good people of fair Ann Arbor and environs (going way beyond just produce too). In fact, there are more than a dozen CSAs in our area from which to choose and a variety of models for participation including: subscription, shareholder, and shopper’s choice.

There are many produce CSAs, with their weekly boxes of gorgeous, fresh, seasonal foods throughout the summer, but there are also some wonderful, innovative CSAs incorporating more than just vegetables. For example, the Harvest Kitchen (formerly Community Farm Kitchen) with its prepared foods CSA, along with CSAs offering meat (Old Pine Farm), locally grown frozen fruits and vegetables (Locavorious), winter hoophouse greens (Brines Farm), and even medicinal herbs (Herbs of Light). It’s getting to be like CSA heaven around here!

If you want a weekly box of locally grown produce this summer, the end of winter is the time to figure out which CSA best matches your needs and then get your application submitted post haste. CSAs fill up around here! Some criteria to consider when making the choice for your produce CSA include:

- **Type of CSA organization:** Most typical is the Subscription model (pay upfront, get a weekly box of vegetables chosen and packed for you). But there is at least one Shareholder farm (like the Subscription model, but greater involvement in decision making and farm process) and at least one Shopper’s Choice (pay upfront, choose weekly which produce you want) out there as well.

- **Growing Practice:** The main differentiators in growing practice are those based on: Conventional Agriculture; Certified Organic; or Biodynamic/Organic Practice (for farms not certified organic, but either in transition to organic certification or in philosophical alignment with the tenets of organic agriculture and beyond organic). Unless a farm is certified organic and says so, you’ll want to ask about this and investigate for yourself.

- **What size share:** Most CSAs offer a share that feeds a family of 2 adults and 2 children for a

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week as the standard. Some options you’ll see include: whole, half, family, individual, senior, standard, large, every other week, etc. Generally you have to ask about this. Consider getting contact information for someone who has previously been a member to check on quantity and quality of the food. If it’s too much food, you can always split your share with friends or neighbors too - they will enjoy the benefits.

• What season/how many weeks: Most produce CSAs seem to have a 20 week season that lasts from June through October. Some offer full season and half season shares. In my research it seems the season for local CSAs may be anywhere from 10-26 weeks. And several are now also offering extended season shares into the winter and spring.

• Price per week: When comparing cost and value among CSA shares, it’s helpful to look at the price per week. This number gives a more accurate basis for decision making, since the overall cost and number of weeks is so variable among different CSAs. Most CSA shares cost in the range of $20-$40 per week. One advantage of splitting a share with neighbors or friends - it costs half as much. We pay $15 per week for our half of a split share of just-picked organic vegetables that are of a quality that we could not buy in any store. I can’t think of anything that’s a better value for us.

• Does the farm specialize in something? Do they grow exotic salad and multi-ethnic greens, or mostly standard “meat and potato” produce? Some CSAs are very greens-intensive, some consciously plant very few greens, some let you choose all your own produce. Check for your preference.

• Pickup time and location: Many (but not all) CSA farms offer pickup at the Ann Arbor Farmers Market on Wednesday or Saturday and also offer pickup at the farm on specific days. Cost is often less for farm pickup. Your week will revolve around this pickup time, so choose one that gives you time to put all those vegetables away. You will also want to ask what the policy is if you cannot make a pickup time - in general you are responsible for making any alternate arrangements if you can’t pick up.

Consider whether you’re interested in farm visits and special events: Many CSAs have opportunities to visit the farm on member work days, or have cooking classes, farm tours, potluck dinners, music festivals, kids’ day camps, etc. Most farms are very happy to have members volunteer their time in any capacity - they all need extra hands and help. Visiting the farm, especially if you have kids, is a great way to see with your own eyes where your food comes from and what goes into making it happen. Many farms welcome visits and connections with open arms. One farmer says of members stopping by: “we get a lot of benefit from a social standpoint because we get to see people, and they get a lot of benefit because they get to connect with the land. We’ve got small children and we get a lot of joy from having people visit.”

In Conclusion I’ve talked to a lot of CSA farmers lately. Most seem to be doing well, expanding their memberships and their farms. Next year we’ll have even more choices, as a few new farms are planning to break ground this year.

I heard again and again how seriously farmers take the responsibility of providing the highest quality produce every week; of the creativity, planning, skill, and flat out labor that goes into those CSA boxes. We are very fortunate to have so much talent and good food so close to us.

Even with some of the richest land in the state, Washtenaw County spends less than 1% of its estimated $1 billion food budget on food that is grown in Washtenaw County by local farmers. By becoming a CSA farm member, we can do something very directly to change that. And eat the freshest, most delicious food too. Becoming a CSA member is transformative in many dimensions.

Prepare to take your tastebuds on a walk. And to open your eyes to the landscapes of beautiful farms brought to life through the care of some of the most hard working people you’ll ever meet. Remember to give warm thanks to the person growing the food for your table - now that you know your farmer.

http://thefarmersmarketer.com
Brines Farm (winter greens CSA)

Owner: Shannon Brines, Dexter, MI
Phone: 734-913-8058
Email: shannon@brines.org
Season: November-April, 23 weeks
Pick-up: Saturday Ann Arbor Farmers Market
Cost: $575
Cost per week: $25/week
Growing practice: Organic practice
Website: http://www.brines.org

After spending the day on GIS mapping and spatial analysis in a full-time University of Michigan job, thirty-something Shannon Brines is a hoophouse farmer. In fact, Brines has three of these 30’x96’ passive solar greenhouse structures in production on the piece of land where he grew up outside of Dexter, and where his parents still live. Brines says he doesn’t use the usual term, “season extension,” for the winter season food growing in which he specializes. Instead he prefers Eliot Coleman’s term “four season harvest.” Coleman’s nationally recognized work in Harborside, Maine and Shannon Brines’ pioneering work in Dexter, Michigan are clear indicators that it is indeed possible to eat from our own northern climate foodsheds even in the coldest months.

Although Brines grows produce for market in the spring and summer months as well, he considers the back side of the year his special niche. Giving armloads of joy to winter farmers market shoppers, he’s been bringing fresh greens (like spinach, kale, komatsuna, claytonia, mustard greens, and collards) to the winter market for the past three years. And in 2009 with three hoophouses in production, he started the area’s first winter greens CSA membership. His target has been to provide three pounds of greens every week, for 23 weeks, to his CSA members. And shares also include a few baby root vegetables - like tiny sweet carrots and white Hakurei turnips.

The greens, mostly from the cold-hardy Brassica family, are intended to supplement the winter diet of a family of four. It helps that these are vegetables that taste their sweetest and best during the coldest weather. Members have told Brines things like “Even though I was not looking forward to winter, somehow having fresh greens makes it more manageable” and “Having greens like komatsuna has given me a reason to look up all the funny names of things I hadn’t heard of before.”

Brines categorizes each type of green as either a “salad” or “stir-fry” vegetable, depending on whether it tastes best raw or cooked. Each week he updates his website with the names and photos of the greens harvested for the week.

The cold hardy greens can make it through everything except weeks of no-sun, below-zero temperatures. Brines says of all the plants that give no quarter and never give up “spinach and claytonia seem to be the winter warriors,” but “it’s been a rough lettuce year.” Even in the coldest months, Brines has had a nice diversity, with at least five different kinds of greens each week.

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That diversity is important to him, in part for the sake of good eating but also for the sake of good farming. Using all organic methods, he rotates his beds, practices companion plantings when he can (though he says more research is needed on the special requirements of hoophouse growing), and works to increase the numbers of beneficial insects, like ladybugs and certain wasps. Because, as he says “if you’ve got a ton of brassicas all in one place, you’d better believe the cabbage worms are going to find it.”

He says that diversity outside the hoophouse is just as important, and that hoophouses are just part of the answer for “full-scale vibrant nutritiousness year round.” He wonders “why not capitalize on the awesome Michigan growing season and learn how to store the best of the seasons in your root cellar - that's the most and best use of the calories. Canning and preserving, making your own slaw and sauerkraut - adding all those elements are just as important as adding hoophouses to the landscape.”

He notes that people have been using those old time food preservation techniques for hundreds and thousands of years in the winter gardens of Europe and in Native American agriculture. Brines is a special fan of heirloom seeds, because “they were developed over hundreds of years to be cold hardy. The ones that we still have are the ones that worked.”

In addition to the full-time University job and the full-time farm, Brines is also one of the principle leaders in sustainability and the good food movement locally, working with Slow Food Huron Valley, the HomeGrown Festival, Transition and O2Michigan. He often appears to be a bit low on sleep. What's the motivation for so much involvement? He says “A lot of the world's issues seem so overwhelming and so polarizing. But they don't have to be. We're either moving more in that direction or we're creating a healthy local economy. The food system is a more approachable way to save the world. It has been a way for me to see the fruits of my labor and to make it so other people can see what's possible too.”

Eating your greens - a way to feel more virtuous, more likely to see your 90th birthday, more connected to your local foodshed, and more like you can save the world. All in one package. Turns out Popeye was onto something.

Capella Farm

 Owners: Jennifer and Dave Kangas, Ann Arbor, MI
 Phone: 734-761-3554
 Email: capellafarm@gmail.com
 Season: May-October, plus a large Thanksgiving share (which has about 2-3 weeks worth of produce) in November is included, about 22 weeks.
 Pick-up: Wednesday and Saturday at Capella Farm on Scio Church Rd.
 Cost: $650, with 15 hours of work for the season. Or, $750 and no work requirement.
 Cost per week: $29 (with work hours), $34 (without work hours).
 Growing practice: Organic practice
 Website: http://www.capellafarm.com/

“Regarding the member work hours, we're mostly doing it so our members will connect and understand what goes into making the food happen, why there's bugs, why there's holes,” says Capella Farm owner and farmer Jennifer Kangas. “The biggest thing that we're trying to do is build a community of neighbors (though some members are from as far away as Northville and Canton) so that we can each other and respect the land and understand where our food is coming from. One thing I'd like people to understand is that if they want food to look a certain way, there are going to be detrimental effects on the environment. If people can learn how to use

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produce that doesn’t look the way they normally see it, that will go a long way. When we do work days, maybe 2-3 a month, we get a lot of benefit from a social standpoint because we get to see people, and they get a lot of benefit because they get to connect with the land. We’ve got small children and we get a lot of joy from having people visit."

Kangas left a career in banking to run Capella Farm, a small, diversified farm west of Ann Arbor, with her husband. She says in addition to the CSA, “we sell eggs for $4 a dozen, and the chickens are fed locally grown grain, and we also sell a limited number of New Holland White heritage turkeys, and Boer meat goats.” They focus on ethical eating and see animals as important to the sustainability of the farm. She says “we believe the natural cycle is that plants need animals and animals need plants. The farm will be self-sufficient if we can live within our natural network, and use manure to feed plants and use the plants to feed the animals.”

Kangas says that although 2009 was their first year, “next year, we’re expanding. 80% of our members from last year renewed. We are looking into becoming Certified Organic. We’re putting up a hoophouse in the spring - to extend the season and get all the seedlings going outside instead of in my house. I want to get the onions and tomatoes in the ground earlier. We’ll have vegetables earlier next year, and more variety throughout the year.”

In addition to the 20 weeks of regular CSA produce, a Capella Farm membership includes a large Thanksgiving share with fresh, leafy greens and storage vegetables like pumpkins, brussels sprouts, potatoes and dried peppers.

Kangas says they’re considering building some benches near the herb garden for possible “drop-in” days, where anyone (not just members) can come by to visit or just sit in a beautiful spot and commune with the flowers and the bees. She also wants to do some events like a spicy pepper party in the fall, and says they’ll have a sauerkraut-making party if they get enough cabbage.

Carpenter’s Greenhouse and Organic Produce

Owner: Dwight Carpenter, Allen, MI
Phone: 517-320-9619
Email: ddcarpenter7@yahoo.com
Season: Mid May–mid October, 20 weeks
Pick-up: Wednesday and Saturday at Ann Arbor Farmers Market; Thursday at Northville Farmers Market; Saturday at Farmington Farmers Market. Monday at Carpenter’s Greenhouse in Allen, MI.
Cost: Full share $340; Half-share $170
Cost per week: $17/week
Growing practice: Certified organic
Website: search on localharvest.org

Carpenter’s CSA program is a little bit different from the “subscription” or “shareholder” models of most CSAs; the Carpenter’s CSA is more like “shoppers choice.” When you sign up, they make out a punchcard with your name and 20 weeks on it. You bring the card each week and if you have a full share, you pick out $20 worth of produce from whatever they have that week and that’s your share. If you want only strawberries for the week, you can get it. And if you want more produce for the week, you get a 15% discount on anything else over the $20 share. In addition, you can pick up on

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a different day whenever you want at any of the markets where they set up. If you go on vacation you don’t lose out, you can just get your card punched later on. And, after your 20 weeks of CSA are finished, you still get the 15% member discount.

Dwight Carpenter says “people absolutely love it. A lot of people don’t like greens or don’t use onions. This way they get just what they want. The reason it works so well for us is because we have 17 acres outside that we garden and then the 1/2 acre in the greenhouse. So we have lots and lots of stuff. I tell people to come in the morning before 11am, because I sell out. But if they call ahead, we’ll put things aside for them.”

The tomato blight during the summer of 2009 was heartbreaking to most farmers, but Carpenter says it turned out to be an exceptionally good year for them. Their tomatoes were protected in their greenhouse. And next year they’re planning to put cucumbers in the greenhouse to protect them against blight too. They also had excellent watermelons and muskmelons. And Carpenter says their onions were huge - close to a pound each.

Carpenter says they had several acres of sweet corn planted this year, but the deer ate it all. So they’re putting up a deer fence. They’re also planting a thousand new raspberry plants and two thousand new strawberry plants. With the half acre greenhouse he’s going to try to start extremely early with tomatoes and cucumbers - after installing a new irrigation system he thinks he may be able to bring his hothouse babies to market as early as the second week in April.

Carpenter is working on extending the season by installing another 3 cold frames for early and late greens. He says he’d like to have lots of different greens available up to December, but it’s very difficult to keep things from freezing once they’re at the open-air Ann Arbor Farmers Market in the coldest weather. He’s definitely not alone when he says “I sure wish they’d put in a covered market.”

Community Farm of Ann Arbor

Farmers: Anne Elder and Paul Bantle, Chelsea, MI
Phone: 734-433-0261
Email: N/A
Season: May-November, about 26 weeks
Pick-up: Wednesday or Saturday at the farm
Cost: Sliding scale: $700-$1800 (target average $1175)
Cost per week: $27-$69/week
Growing practice: Biodynamic/Demeter Certified
Work requirement: 15 hours per season (or additional $125)
Website: http://www.communityfarmofaa.org
Plus: Honey, flowers, herbs, straw

“Tending the earth and knowing that it’s getting healthier is a wonderful thing,” says farmer Anne Elder. “Because we have animals we can practice a true biodynamic system and I love that we practice biodynamic agriculture.” She continues “One of my favorite things is to see a child start eating this food, and watching them year after year, seeing them grow healthier and stronger and knowing I’m a part of that.”
first in the country to be developed around the CSA model. The farm’s colorful and heartwarming history, involving the members holding bake sales over 10 years to raise the money to purchase the development rights for the land, is just one of the ways in which Community Farm is unique.

Community Farm is among the few CSA farms that practice the original “shareholder” (rather than “subscription”) model where the members themselves (rather than the farmers) own the farm and take responsibility for its mission. Elder explains “the farmers are hired by our membership and paid by our members, they (the members) decide the budget and the finances of everything at the farm. That’s an incredible empowerment to give to people.”

She continues “Our meetings are based on consensus; we strive for everyone to have agreement...We move about change pretty slowly. It drives some people crazy, but helps with keeping the farm very stable. There is a big effort to keep the love force very strong on the farm and it’s very successful.”

Their intention toward healing the earth is among the reasons for practicing the biodynamic method of agriculture in which they are certified. According to Demeter, the US Biodynamic certifying organization, biodynamic standards include and are stricter than those for organic certification, and “involve managing a farm within the context of the principles of a living organism....Fertility and feed arise out of the recycling of the organic material the system generates. Avoidance of pest species is based on biological vigor and its intrinsic biological and genetic diversity. Water is efficiently cycled through the system... An important environmental value of Biodynamic farming is that it does not depend on the mining of the earth’s natural resource base. Instead it emphasizes contributing to it. As such, it is a farming philosophy that results in one of the lightest carbon footprints of any agricultural method.”

As part of that philosophy, Community Farm recently converted one of its mid-century tractors to solar power. They continue to look for ways to incorporate wind and solar power for the farm.

Most of the CSA farms in our area have a distribution season from 18-22 weeks long, but Community Farm’s season is longer - about 26 weeks. Farmer Anne Elder says that members get between 1-4 grocery bags of food every week and that most shares are split between 2 families. Members come to the farm to pick up their food each week, which Elder says is also a great opportunity to get more u-pick vegetables and to run into friends. Elder remarks that they want to foster that connection and that “we try to make it so people can just come and lay a blanket down and take nap. Sometimes we’ve had people with cancer come out out, set up a lawn chair and heal in the love of the farm. Kids just come and run around and become familiar with the smells, sounds, and sights of farming. Knowing the smell of good soil. That’s a real deep seed in a being.”

Down on the Farm

Contact: Amos Coblentz, Homer, MI  
Address: 299910 R Drive S., Homer, MI 49245  
Phone: 517-542-2025 (call between 7:30-8:30am)  
Email: N/A

Season: June-October, 20 weeks
Pick-up: Saturday Ann Arbor Farmers Market 9am-1pm, Thursday Westside Farmers Market 4-7pm, Tuesday 777 Building, Tuesday Downtown Ypsilanti Farmers Market 2-6pm, (also drop off in Marshall, Jackson, Holt, and Homer)

Cost: Small share (2 people) $300, Standard

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share (4 people) $525, Large share (8 people) $800

Cost per week: Small $15, Standard $26.25, Large $40

Growing practice: Organic practice (2 of the farms are certified organic, 2 are in transition but use organic practices)

Website: N/A

Plus: Can order beef, chicken, eggs in a CSA, and will have monthly order for Amish-made jams, noodles, candies and other goods.

Amos Coblentz is an Amish farmer from Homer, Michigan who has joined with three neighboring farmers to start the first cooperative CSA I’ve learned about. Coblentz says “we’re all in the Amish community here, within five miles of each other. We’ve known each other probably 15-20 years. We have two church districts here, that helps us keep tabs on each other.” Two of the farms are in Homer (Coblentz Acres and Kuntry Greenhouse), and two are in Litchfield (Miller’s Country Acres and Herumbja Greenhouse). Coblentz’s son Lester describes Homer and Litchfield as “two pea-sized towns” southwest of Jackson.

Lester says working cooperatively “helps with a variety of ideas. Four heads are better than one.” His dad says “I thought about doing it myself, but then I thought - what if I can’t raise everything people want? Well, if I can’t raise enough of something, another guy can do it.” And that’s how they’ve worked it out - they’re each responsible for packing the boxes for one of their drop-off points, but if they run out of something they call on the others. Coblentz explains their interdependence: “If I need some potatoes I ask some other guy what he’d trade for potatoes, or just buy them from him.”

They started the CSA program in 2009. Amos Coblentz says it works because “if I go to market without the CSA I could sit there all day and not sell anything. If I go with the CSA, then I know it’s sold already and I’m a step ahead.”

All of the labor to produce the food is done without tractors or other machines. When I asked about the advantages of using horse and human power Coblentz’s response was “Don’t know there’s much advantage to it, but that’s the way we live, and we like it like that.”

One technology they do use is hoophouse growing to extend the season. Coblentz appreciates having early tomatoes: “I’ve had a hoophouse already for 10 years, and we kind of like that. I don’t specialize in really late things, but I will have early tomatoes, peppers, and green beans. I can get tomatoes by the 4th of July, then the peppers, then green beans pretty soon after that.”

Last year they tried using a checklist system to let people choose what they wanted in their CSA boxes, but found that the logistics were too complex. This year Coblentz is going to pack all of his boxes the same, but bring in some extras to allow members to trade out things they don’t like for things they prefer. So if green beans stick in your craw, you can swap those for eggplant or cucumbers instead. Coblentz says the weekly amount changes over the season, “At the first part of the year the produce ain’t really coming that heavy. Toward the last, the produce is in full swing by then to make up for it.”

If you like the produce, you can also pre-order eggs, chicken and beef. And you can actually go “down on the farm” to a couple of events each season that they invite members to attend.

Frog Holler Organic Farm

Owners: The King Family, Brooklyn, MI
Phone: 517-592-8017
Email: kings@froghollerorganic.com
Season: June-October, 18 weeks
Pick-up: Saturday at Ann Arbor Farmers Market, or at the farm Saturday or Sunday

http://thefarmersmarketer.com
Cost: $450 (or $400 for pick-up at the farm)
Cost per week: $25/week (or $22/week with farm pick-up)
Growing practice: Organic practice
Website: http://froghollerorganic.com/

When Ken and Cathy King started Frog Holler Organic Farm back in 1972 they lived in a log cabin on their land that was formerly a wildlife sanctuary. Soon they were joined on the farm by their 3 sons, Billy, Kenny and Edwin, who have continued the farming and music-making that Ken King loved.

The Kings were the first to bring intentionally organic produce to the Ann Arbor Farmers Market in the 1970s. Cathy King says they were also the first to bring arugula to that market in the early 1980s, and at the time people didn’t have a clue what it was.

King says the family started their CSA program in response to the requests of their customers. Frog Holler Organic Farm, says King has “a healthy market stall and a good community there, but we had so many people ask if we had a market box. We were drawn not so much by the financial thing, but this was another interface that customers were asking for. And there’s a creative component to it.”

So what’s that creative component? King says “we’re designing the box within the limits of what we can grow. We’re trying to give people a really good cooking experience week by week. We’re thinking about what would be balanced, and what would be good; about recipes we like to share that we love...There’s a creativity in finding ways to interact with people and in asking what does it mean to members to be in CSA - and what can we provide.”

Frog Holler specializes in salad and cooking greens, and one option they offer for their CSA members is the “salad share” that includes an extra portion of their locally famous salad mix. The salad mix, for true salad aficionados, contains already washed greens, tossed with bits of herbs and confetti-like edible flowers. With over a dozen ingredients, it’s beautiful and colorful, and every mouthful is a work of edible art.

King says that starting up a CSA has its highs and lows, noting “we’ve found out that we like it and...it’s also a lot of work. Because we take it seriously and there’s a responsibility and we feel badly if it seems like we come up short. That’s kind of written into it. (Because of the blight last summer) it was just awful not having tomatoes this year. Awful.” But also, “we’ve learned that CSA members are really accepting and energized around food - and that stimulates us. Members put their money down and said just give us anything. Bring it. That feels good.”

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One thing people like about the CSA share is having a reason to eat their vegetables and try new things. King describes it as a sort of “health trainer in a box.” She says that at Frog Holler they’re focused on growing the things they believe in, and things that people might not already be familiar with, like the sweet white Hakurei turnips. King says “they’re a delicacy, but we don’t have time at the market to educate everyone about them. In the share we can put things that might be unfamiliar, like turnips, with a recipe, and people love it. It’s win-win-win.”

Frog Holler Organic Farm CSA members also get a couple of unique benefits - invitations to the farm for a 4th of July picnic and to the October “Hollerween” party, plus 2 free tickets to HollerFest, the weekend-long local music, food, and community festival hosted at the farm in August.

Inchworm Microgreens

**Owner:** Brian Steinberg  
**Phone:** 734-646-2679  
**Email:** Chefbrian1@yahoo.com  
**Season:** May-September, 15 weeks  
**Pick-up:** Thursday 4-7pm at the Westside Farmers Market, Ann Arbor  
**Cost:** Full Share $180, Half Share $90, flexible share (cost varies). A $10 refundable tray and soil deposit is required.  
**Cost per week:** $12 (full share), $6 (half share) per week  
**Growing practice:** Organic practice  
**Website:** [http://lastoneeating.wordpress.com/inchworm-updates/](http://lastoneeating.wordpress.com/inchworm-updates/)

According to Brian Steinberg, “microgreens are tray grown sprouts, and shoots, which are young plants that are harvested and eaten before the first true leaves form. Or in the case of micro-herbs like cilantro and basil, the microgreens are harvested when the first true leaves appear. Pea shoots are slightly bigger. Each individual microgreen is a plant at an early stage....Picture eating your broccoli plants at about an inch high.”

And where do microgreens grow? On a micro-farm of course! The farm is really at Steinberg’s normal suburban house in Ann Arbor, where he has space for up to 200 trays of these micro-veggies.

Like regular size vegetables, Steinberg says “microgreens are packed with nutrition and have big flavor. That is why they have become popular with chefs and home cooks.”

And apparently, microgreens are not just for folks with upscale palates. According to Steinberg, “for starters kids are blown away with pea shoot microgreens because they are very sweet tasting, just like a sweet pea. When I sampled them at the HomeGrown Festival, I was surprised how children responded to them. They kept asking for me to cut more for them.”

Although he’s also studying for a degree in journalism and broadcasting, Steinberg says “I knew I wanted to be a local food producer, and when I started growing microgreens, I found that opportunity. I love fact that they are tray grown, and that CSA members will receive fresh (still living) local food.” The notion of living food, food that is still attached to the soil and imbued with life force, definitely takes the idea of local food another step.

And because this living food is portable, perhaps it’s a way for more people to make growing food part of daily life. It certainly is for Steinberg, who notes “the live tray is also another fun appeal. At my house, I like to keep a tray on the dinner table throughout the week, and cut them fresh for our salad, or garnish for stir fries, sandwich wraps, in omelets, or just eat them raw.” At Chez Steinberg “they have become our raw go to snack just like baby raw carrots are for many people.”

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CSA members with a full share, (which consists of a weekly full tray of microgreens) can get either: just one kind of greens like pea shoots, sunflower seed shoots, or wheat grass for juicers OR half and half: two half trays of any type of microgreen, OR a half tray of one variety and four mini inserts of microgreens like basil, radish, cilantro, beet, etc.

Steinberg says that a full share of pea or sunflower shoots comes out to about a pound per tray. Bought pre-harvested they’re $15 per ounce, so if you’re a microgreen maniac, getting a CSA share for these living foods is also a way to micro-size your expenses.

Needle-Lane Farm

**Farm Manager:** Beverly Ruesink, Tipton, MI  
**Phone:** 517-263-5912  
**Email:** needlelane@tc3net.com  
**Season:** Full season: 20 weeks from end of May to mid-October; Summer season: 12 weeks from July-September  
**Pick-up:** Tuesday at Morgan and York (on Packard) after 12pm; Tuesday at Needle-Lane Farm, also Saturdays at Tecumseh Farmers Market and Adrian Farmers Market  
**Cost:** Summer Season/Single (1-2 person): $284, Summer Season/Family (3-4 person): $454, Full Season/Single: $380, Full Season/Family: $660  
**Cost per week:** Summer season/Single: $23.66; Summer season/Family: $37.83; Full Season/Single: $19; Full Season/Family: $33  
**Growing practice:** Organic practice, "Unconventionally grown"  
**Website:** [http://www.needlelanefarms.com](http://www.needlelanefarms.com)  
**Note:** A weekly cut flower share is also available ($200 for 16 weeks), plus beef available by the quarter, and U-cut Christmas trees

“I’ve been thinking about saying that our produce is “unconventionally grown,” muses farm manager Beverly Ruesink. “Since we don’t pay for it, we can’t use the “o” word. But everything we do is in keeping with organic practice.” After earning her degree in Horticulture from Michigan State University and helping to start the MSU organic farm CSA, Ruesink came home to her family’s 70 acre farm to start the Needle-Lane CSA in 2005.

In addition to the produce CSA, the farm also offers beef by the quarter, and they have a U-cut Christmas tree patch, along with wreaths and decorations for the holidays. And, they offer a cut flower share, a weekly quart-sized bunch of old-fashioned flowers like: asters, sweet peas, gladiolus, dahlias, statice, sunflowers, and zinnias. According to their website “flowers are a part of the farm’s biodiversity mission and not only add beauty to our farm but also to your house. Flowers also provide habitat and food for beneficial insects and companion planting benefits.”

Needle-Lane Farm has about 10 acres under cultivation for produce and Ruesink says that it’s grown, year by year. She says “people really like the freshness of the vegetables, and knowing they’re supporting a local farmer.”

A CSA is a complex system where both planning and action go into growing thousands of seedlings, working out long-term crop rotations, and fixing machinery, as well as communicating with members, accounting, and setting delivery schedules. When I asked Ruesink if being a woman in charge of running such a complex operation had any special challenges or conferred any particular advantages she demurred “With CSA management, anyone could do it if they really wanted to. Not having a partner in this means the burden of all the complexity of running a farm and solving problems comes down to me. But I’m working on finding the right people to step into different positions.”

Like many CSA farmers, Ruesink mentors a few interns each season who in turn help with the...
work of the farm. She says “If you really want to work on a farm I’ll take you if you’re smart and want to learn and work hard.” It seems like there are more and more young people coming for these internships who are interested in learning farming. Ruesink thinks perhaps that’s because there’s “an inherent part of a human being that wants to be connected to nature, or maybe it’s our current disconnection that has made more people interested.”

Needle-Lane Farm does not come to the Ann Arbor Farmers Market, but it does drop off at Morgan and York on Packard on Tuesday afternoons. Since the share boxes are stored in their coolers, you could even come by on Wednesday morning and it would still be fresh.

Our Family Farm

**Owners:** John and Lois Hochstetler, Manchester, MI  
**Phone:** 734-428-9100,  
**Email:** ourfamilyfarm@sbcglobal.net  
**Season:** June-November, 21 weeks  
**Pick-up:** Ann Arbor Farmers Market Saturday and Wednesday  
**Cost:** Standard share (4 person) $525. Also have Large share (4-6 person) for $675. And an Every-other-week Standard share for $310.  
**Cost per week:** $27.40 (standard share); $32.14 (large share); $31 (every other week share)  
**Growing practice:** Naturally grown  
**Website:** http://www.ourfamilyfarmllc.com/

**Note:** Also have a Winter CSA with options for eggs, chickens, turkey and pork.

A stalwart presence at the Ann Arbor Farmers Market for the past few years, John Hochstetler, aka “Farmer John,” looks the picture of old-school farmer in his Carhartt jacket and knitted cap. But he offers up a new-school aphorism to describe his reason for being there “Health from the farm, not the pharmacy.”

In the coldest months he and Lois, his pretty, dark-haired wife of more than 30 years, are at the market every single week with eggs for sure, and likely some potatoes or a few of their hydroponically grown greens.

Hochstetler says that they were the 4th farm in Michigan to be growing hydroponically. Having the plants at waist height seems to be a help when you’re getting a little older and the knees are acting up. And he says that customers also really appreciate the fact that there’s no dirt in his beautiful Red Rollo or Jericho lettuce.

He says he likes to “grow crops that mainstream America likes best and I stay away from the foreign stuff. I want to give people standard food items, not exotic Food Network stuff that takes two hours to cook.”

Hochstetler says their three biggest sellers are tomatoes, potatoes and lettuce. Together with onions and eggs, those five items form the core of what CSA members get every week. They add to those main items things like radishes, greens, and arugula in the spring, and more as the summer crops come in, including honey from their own bees.

Hochstetler is a DIY guy who loves experimenting. He wants to do more with hydroponics and hoophouses (he says he thinks he can get hoophouse tomatoes by the Fourth of July), and the next thing he wants to try is pond farming with tilapia.

Pregitzer Farm Market CSA

**Owners:** Shannon and Wade Pregitzer, Munith, MI  
**Phone:** 517-769-2768  
**Email:** shannon@yourfarmmarket.com  
**Season:** June-October, 14 weeks  
**Pick-up:** Thursday at Ann Arbor Westside Farmers Market; Friday at the farm; Tuesday in Jackson at the Water Treatment Center “duck
pond” on Lansing Ave.; Wednesday at Chelsea Hospital Farmers Market and at the Stockbridge Veteran’s park.

**Cost:**
- Full share (4-6 person) $395
- Half share (2-3 person) $250
- Every-other-week share (1-2 person) $155

**Cost per week:**
- Full share: $28
- Half share: $18
- Every other week share: $22

**Growing practice:** “Conventional tillage and Integrated Pest Management. Mostly in transition. We still use some commercial pesticide if we have to, but are using more organic methods all the time, getting into more sustainable farm with cover crops like clover and rye to put nitrogen back into the soil. We don’t have to spray for weeds because we mulch with plastic. We’re not going as far as being certified organic because it’s such a huge process.”

**Website:** http://yourfarmmarket.com/

**Note:** Pregitzer Farm also has chickens (pre-order) and egg shares: 1 dozen eggs each week for 14 weeks is $38 (or $2.70/dozen). Or, 1 dozen every other week for 7 weeks is $20 ($2.85/dozen).

Shannon Pregitzer says that in their CSA program “customers like that they get a lot of summertime favorites: cukes, tomatoes, peppers and sweet corn. We put our top quality produce in the CSA box. It’s been really successful. And people like that we put information and recipes in the boxes - that has been a hit. Eggs have been a huge hit. We’re going to do more chickens this year, and hopefully have more egg shares. We want to have at least 40 egg shares available.”

Pregitzer says they had heard about the CSA model and thought about it for a few years before they decided to give it a try. Their first year was in 2006 and they started with about 10 members. Next year they plan to have 150 members.

When I talked to a smiling and friendly Wade Pregitzer at the Westside Farmers Market last summer, he said that people have been known to drive more than 100 miles to get his special sweet corn. And he offered a great price on heirloom tomatoes if I was willing to come out and pick them myself; he had lots that he wasn’t going to be able to get to. Both the corn and the tomatoes were excellent. When I asked him if they specialize in something with their farm share he said they put in the “real meat and potatoes vegetables and stay away from those exotic leaves.”

Shannon Pregitzer says they did put in some kale and collards last year, but she “doesn’t know how far we’ll go with the greens.” The implication seems to be that theirs is a CSA that doesn’t focus a lot on the green leafy end of things.

Pregitzer says they try to accommodate their members’ likes and dislikes, noting “we do offer some substitutions. If you aren’t ever going to eat something, we’ll put something else in if we can. We did that last year. Some people couldn’t eat corn - they got a couple ears for other people in the family, then more zucchini, cucumbers or tomatoes. Some didn’t want any cabbage, or green peppers. We don’t guarantee it, but when I’m out packing I try to keep it in mind.”

They currently have 3 heated and one unheated greenhouse on their 25 acres of land. They’re considering putting in another two or three unheated coldframe greenhouses so that they can start to get some crops earlier: like broccoli, kohlrabi, snap peas, radishes, and spinach.

Members are invited to two main yearly events - their spring membership party and a big fall open
house, which includes tours of their greenhouses and farm, with a hayride, a corn maze and a free trip to the pumpkin patch to pick out a jack-o-lantern.

Pregitzer also notes “we are offering a working share this year. We don’t have a standard number of hours, but we’re offering it to people if they want to come and work some hours to offset the cost of the CSA. We’ll pay what we pay our other workers and take that off their total. For some of our customers, money is a little tight right now. This might be a way to help out a little bit.”

Sunseed Farm

Owners: Tomm and Trilby Becker
Farm Location: Near the corner of Joy and Maple Roads, just northwest of Ann Arbor.
Phone: 517-980-0893
Email: farm.sunseed@gmail.com
Season: “We have 3 CSA sessions that we offer throughout the year. Spring share runs 16 weeks from January through April. The Summer share runs 16 weeks from May through mid-August. Fall share runs 16 weeks from the end of August through December. That makes 48 weeks of CSA distribution through the year.”
Pick-up: Thursday at the farm
Cost: Spring share (16 weeks) $320; Summer share (16 weeks) $560; Fall share (16 weeks) $560.
Cost per week: Spring share: $20; Summer and Fall share: $35
Growing practice: “Ecologically and naturally grown, without synthetic pesticides or fertilizers, building the health of the soil.”
Website: http://www.farmsunseed.com/

Tomm and Trilby Becker are the newest couple behind the newest CSA I’ve learned about so far. They got married last fall, and with the financial support of the “Small Farms, Small Farmers” initiative (run by Lisa Gottlieb and Jeff McCabe) the Beckers put up their first hoop house last fall and only recently returned from a romantic European honeymoon. They recently released their first membership application for their new CSA, which will be among the first to extend to 48 weeks of total production in 16 week shares for the spring, summer, and fall seasons.

Tomm Becker notes that with his experience managing the year-round Student Organic Farm at MSU, producing food in the colder months will be a specialty of theirs. He says “we grow year round in passive solar hoop houses, and protect some crops in the fields with agrilawn and straw mulch. It makes a lot of sense for us financially to extend our season, and we believe it’s important to maintain our community’s food supply through the winter. We want to grow everything that we can at this point in this climate.”

Their new website lists the dozens of vegetables they’ll be growing - from arugula to zucchini, with celeriac, edamame, melons, sweet corn, and tomatoes in between. It’s a long list! Becker says their shares are designed for four people - 2 adults and 2 children.

Both Beckers have backgrounds that led only circuitously to farming, with Tomm’s in English Literature, and Trilby’s as an environmental activist. Tomm Becker’s experience of working on the MSU Student Organic Farm in the process of getting a degree in English opened up the possibility of growing food for a living. He says: “It’s a wonderful thing to do. The process of it is very humbling and yet very empowering to me, just giving water and surrendering myself to the weather and the faith of seeding and being able to steward so many living things. That’s one side I really love, another side is providing for my community and feeding people and connecting with people through

http://thefarmersmarketer.com
food."

He continues “I worked at MSU for about 5 years. And in that time there had been children born, and now they are little people, talking, and walking around. It’s just cool to think about how the food I guided into being helped form their bodies. It’s an honor to grow food. I love it. It feels good to be outside and working. I like the motions of farming aside from those more cerebral concepts; I like the work itself.”

Becker says he’s in the process now of seeding the hoop house with lettuce, kale, chard and some root vegetables for their first crops. And outside of that passive solar structure says “I’m putting in a cover crop, winter rye, and clover, to build the soil and lock in nutrients over the coming years.”

They are able to make this start thanks to the friends who own the land, which will eventually have a conservation easement through the Ann Arbor Greenbelt to preserve it as farmland and allow the Beckers to purchase it.

The Beckers have big plans to eventually implement a permaculture system that will incorporate animals, and ever-bearing fruit trees and berry bushes. Becker says he thinks that someday they’d like to have more land under production, and will see their starter farm turned into a farm incubator that could help other new farmers make their own start.

That’s especially heartening considering the depressing news from the 2007 Ag Census that says that the median age of farmers increased between 2002 to 2007 from 55.3 to 57.1, and that the number of farmers under age 25 fell by 30%, while the number of farmers over age 75 grew by 20%. With fewer than 2% of Americans growing our food, we need more ways of getting new farmers! So this CSA is important for many reasons.

Moving into a new year of relationships that will connect them to each other, their land, and their community Becker says that for the next big thing on their event horizon “We’ll probably hold a hoop house raising celebration with a workday and bonfire party. And if we wanted to make it really fun, we’d invite some of our musician friends to lively things up.”

**Tantré Farm**

**Owners:** Deb Lentz and Richard Andres, Chelsea, MI

**Phone:** 734-475-4323

**Email:** tantrefarm@hotmail.com

**Season:** Early June-Mid October, 20 weeks

**Pick-up:** Saturday at Community High in Ann Arbor and at the Chelsea Farmers Market; Wednesday at Ann Arbor Farmers Market; Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday pickup available at Tantre Farm

**Cost:** Full share $600 for 20 weeks (or $575 for farm pickup).

**Cost per week:** $30/week (or $28.75/week for farm pick-up)

**Growing practice:** Certified organic

**Website:** http://tantrefarm.com

**Note:** Depending on what’s still available, Tantré will offer their extended season share for an additional 3-4 weeks in the fall, plus a large Thanksgiving share with about 60 pounds of...
storage vegetables. These are priced separately and usually available to non-members as well.

Certified organic since they started in 2001, Tantré Farm is one of the largest and best known of the local CSAs, with well over 300 members. Owners Deb Lentz and Richard Andres represent the two essential halves that make up the yin and the yang of the farm. Andres orchestrates the planting, growing and harvesting of the food; Lentz manages the communication and the organization of people, resources and activities.

Deb Lentz says that for her “it’s all about community building and networking. I love being connected to this diverse alternative community....without the CSA, I don’t think I would have found that.”

Lentz and Andres have worked very hard to create a welcoming atmosphere at Tantré. All members are invited to come out to the farm to visit, help, walk around, picnic, harvest - anything - almost any time. There’s always something to do on the farm and all they ask is for a phone call in advance.

Much of the daily labor of planting, weeding, watering, mulching and harvesting the food is done by young (and older) interns who live, work, and learn on the farm for the entire season. Eating, working and living together brings them together as kind of a patchwork family. Lentz says that mothering that extended family, helping with life skills, basic cooking, even things like hanging clothes on the line, and general relationship issues has become a part of her role that she enjoys.

It’s a good complement for the work of putting seeds in the ground and getting them to grow which Lentz acknowledges is the domain of her partner, Richard Andres. She says that Andres enjoys the work of growing plants and creating food as part of a larger system that can have a wider, even global effect.

The Tantré share box easily feeds four people and includes an impressive assortment. Lentz explains that they have designed the weekly boxes to include each part of the plant - roots, stems, leaves, fruits and seeds. And that they want people to be able to easily make a salad, a stir-fry, and other main dish foods from what’s in each weekly box.

In addition to the regular summer share, Tantré Farm has also begun offering 3-4 week “fall harvest” shares, and a large Thanksgiving share with up to 60 pounds of mainly storage vegetables. And members often have the opportunity to pick extra produce if they’d like more to freeze or preserve.

Tantré hosts a number of special events during the year. There is a yearly informational meeting for new CSA members in April, several special farm days for kids, along with spring, summer and fall work parties that include member potlucks. Lentz also coordinates several hands-on cooking classes that help with ideas for making produce into meals, and she hosts workshops on topics like tomato preserving, and kimchi and cider making.

Whatever they’re doing, it seems to be working. Deb Lentz consults their most recent member survey about what people say they like. The most common response, she says, is about how glad members are to support an ethical, organic, local farm and to know where their food comes from. But they also say that getting the weekly box of vegetables is like opening a Christmas present, that they love eating with the seasons, and that it’s a wonderful way to teach their children where their food comes from.

Two Creeks Organics

Owners: Amie and Mark Sanford, Manchester, MI
Phone: 734-678-1984
Email: twocreeksorganic@aol.com
Season: Late May-Early October, 20 weeks (last year they also did a 10 week share season)

http://thefarmersmarketer.com
Pick-up: Thursday at Westside Farmers Market in Ann Arbor, Thursday through Saturday at the farm, Friday at Saline Farmers Market
Cost: $600 for full share, $325 for half share
Cost per week: $30/week (full share), $16.25/week (half share)
Growing practice: Certified naturally grown.
“Our fields have been in hay for over ten years with no chemicals or pesticides used on them. Our poultry is pasture fed with no hormones or antibiotics.”
Website: http://www.twocreeksorganics.com/

Note: Two Creeks Organics has a farmstand at the farm. They sell honey and free-range eggs all year. They also have pastured chickens, ducks, and turkeys for sale. They offer farm tours, and run week-long summer camps.

A second career for both of them, Amie and Mark Sanford have been running Two Creeks Organics as a CSA farm since 2007. Mark grew up on a farm and had dreamed about getting back to that kind of life. When he suffered a career-changing accident, it seemed like the right time to buy property for an organic farm. Of their 20 acres near Manchester, about 4 or 5 are under cultivation for the CSA, and they just put in about an acre of new fruit trees.

The Sanfords got their start with some mentoring help from other local farmers. Amie Sanford says “Tim and Robin Leonard of Garden Patch said ‘you should do a CSA, you need a website and you need to hook up with LocalHarvest.org.’” And that “when we met Patricia and Ken Huling of Valley Family Farm at the market, we kind of joined forces with them. Last spring we were going to do some hoops for our row covers and Ken got the metal and my husband bent them, put on the covers and set them up. They’re getting older, so there’s a few things we can do to help them out. When Ken goes to E&R Seed (in Indiana) for seed potatoes, he picks up seed for us.”

Sanford enthuses about those potatoes from E&R Seed “They have the Irish Cobbler potatoes and they are the most awesome potatoes. You have to watch them because they can get the blight that happened during the Irish potato famine. But they are just delicious.” Another member favorite from the CSA was the sweet potatoes they grew for the first time last year - Beauregard, a northern hardy variety.

In addition to the produce CSA, Amie Sanford says “we’re starting to have a lot call for our chickens. We do about 150 at a time, regular Cornish Rocks for meat chickens. We have three chicken tractors, so about 50 go in each, and we have a small brooder tractor that we put the chicks in. The chicken tractors are pastured on grass and moved every day. We have to have something to protect them (the chickens) because we have a lot of coyotes. We feed them all natural grain and have them processed by a licensed Amish family.”

In addition to their produce, they offer a “Chicken CSA” with six ready-to-cook whole chickens in June, August and October in a full share for $315. That’s about $17.50 per chicken. And Two Creeks offers a half share on chickens as well - three birds in each month of June, August and October for $158.

As a contribution to the community the Sanfords donate two full produce shares to the Community Resource Center in Manchester, their local food bank. That started last year when they had an excess of eggs. Amie Sanford offered the eggs to the food bank and the director was delighted because she had a client who needed non-meat protein. When Sanford mentioned that they also had extra vegetables she learned that the
Community Resource Center didn’t get fresh produce very often and needed more. After Sanford’s offer of a donation, the food bank applied for and got a grant to purchase a commercial refrigerator. When I asked Sanford what made them interested in the work of the food bank she said simply “We like to be able to help out.”

In mid-February, Amie Sanford says she’s itching to get into the greenhouse to get the seeds planted, but that it will be a couple of weeks still before she can get started. But if they get that hoophouse they applied for through the USDA grant program, they’ll be experimenting with extra early produce next year.

Zilke Vegetable Farm

Owners: Tom and Vicki Zilke
Phone: 734-260-2324
Email: ZilkeVegetableFarm@gmail.com
Season: May-October, 22 weeks
Pick-up: Thursdays 2-7pm at Ann Arbor Westside Farmer’s Market; Tuesdays 2-7pm at Downtown Ypsilanti Farmer’s Market,, At the farm on Friday. Also at markets in Taylor and Plymouth, MI.
Cost: Full bushel ($450/22 weeks, 4-6 person); Half bushel ($300/22 weeks, 2-3 person); Bi-weekly full bushel ($300 /11 weeks)
Cost per week: (22 weeks) full bushel: $20.45, (22 weeks) half bushel: $13.64; bi-weekly (11 weeks) half bushel: $27.27
Growing practice: “Natural, abide by organic principles, tweak the nitrogen on the sweet corn, otherwise no chemicals on the farm”
Website: www.zilkevegetablefarm.com

Tom Zilke is like a lot of farmers who are the ultimate generalists and practical DIY guys. But he is also totally pumped about having a farm and growing things. He might be high on life even. “I absolutely love being able to get fresh food into peoples’ hands in such a direct manner. It’s fun to be able to provide that type of produce and see the way they light up. I get excited, and they get excited about that. Oh my stars, I hope you get the opportunity to walk around here and look at things.”

Zilke turned the old family swimming pool into a greenhouse. Put hoops up over the top and blew hot air in throughout the winter so he could harvest kale. He’s also experimenting with “low-tunnels” Basically covering row crops with a layer of insulating plastic suspended over metal hoops. By March, his onions were already a foot and a half tall he says. And he’s planning to do more with season extension - he’s going to be growing potatoes and greens in his hoophouse and wants to be able to take it all the way through the winter.

Zilke and his wife, Vicki, started growing vegetables for more than just their home garden in 2008, when they first heard about Community Supported Agriculture. Something about working with the CSA model clicked for them. Zilke says “It’s an incredible tool for getting vegetables into consumers’ hands. I love that marriage of people feeling free to come out to the farm....What’s neat is the fact that there’s so much interest from the press and everybody else. I love doing it.”

Zilke says there’s even international interest in the form of a visitor this summer: “I have a gal coming for 6 weeks on an internship from France. She found us on localharvest.org. Her background is in ag engineering. I make a lot of my own equipment to install plants so it should be pretty interesting for her to see.”

So should the Friday night salsa parties they have - that’s the edible kind, not the dance kind - where they make up huge batches of salsa with homegrown tomatoes and peppers. Because things at Zilke Vegetable Farm are hot, hot, hot!

http://thefarmersmarketer.com
BEYOND PRODUCE
CSAs

Harvest Kitchen - was Community Farm Kitchen (ready-to-eat dishes CSA)

Owner: Mary Wessel Walker, Ann Arbor, MI
Business address: 1923 Geddes Rd., Ann Arbor, MI (Anthroposophical Society)
Phone: 734-395-7782
Season: Summer/Fall: June-November, Winter/Spring: December-May (25 weeks each season)
Email: info@harvest-kitchen.com
Pick-up: Tuesdays (Vegetarian share), Fridays (Omnivore share) at 1923 Geddes Rd., Ann Arbor, MI (at the Anthroposophical Society)
Web: www.harvest-kitchen.com

Wholesome and pink-cheeked, Mary Wessel Walker’s is the face of a new kind of ethical entrepreneur. This bright-eyed twenty-something Bryn Mawr Philosophy grad who started the Harvest Kitchen CSA (formerly called Community Farm Kitchen CSA) spent her childhood eating and learning from the green fields of Community Farm of Ann Arbor (and still works there 2 days a week). Now she’s running a small business that works with several other women food entrepreneurs in a way that makes all of them stronger, and at the same time helps people come to the table together around food that is good for them, good for the people who raised it and good for the planet.

Wessel Walker says the goal in starting her business was to “expand the CSA market to people who didn’t have the time or know-how to cook.” Helping people put together healthy meals they could enjoy as a family, even if they’re too busy to cook, was also a philosophical choice toward right-livelihood and toward increasing the number of members for the venerable Community Farm of Ann Arbor.

When Wessel Walker started the original Community Farm Kitchen CSA in 2007, the idea was to encourage busy members to eat local, biodynamically grown food by making it convenient. Every week Wessel Walker would pick up freshly harvested member shares from Community Farm, and return the food to each member as 5-6 different prepared dishes (like Stuffed Carnival Squash or Cauliflower Risotto or Beet and Carrot Burgers), ready either for a weeknight dinner or to be put in the freezer for storage. But only during Community Farm’s 26 week production season.

And while 26 weeks is a fantastic CSA season any way you slice it, most people want to keep on eating that lovely food for the rest of the year. So over the past winter the business has expanded to encompass two six-month seasons, plus more farms and more menu options, and it now also includes a new business partner, Michelle Hartmann. The expansion in menus, seasons, and list of farms also spurred the name change from Community Farm Kitchen to Harvest Kitchen.

One major change, says Wessel Walker, has been the addition of an “omnivore” menu option that includes ethically raised meat. In addition to vegetarian dishes made from seasonal Community Farm produce, Harvest Kitchen now offers dishes made from humanely raised,
pastured meats from Old Pine Farm in Manchester and, in winter, uses local Locavorious frozen vegetables and fruits. Harvest Kitchen employs, on a part-time basis, over a dozen people; and gets fresh, local dishes to people who are too busy to process and cook all that food themselves. Adding additional savor, they say “the enthusiasm and energy of our crew of cooks add the two secret ingredients to every Harvest Kitchen dish: joy and love.”

By creating a business that relies on local farms and other small ventures (presently all woman owned), Wessel Walker has been instrumental in knitting together what researcher Ken Meter of the Crossroads Resource Center in Minnesota calls a “Value Network - (relationships) that build upon existing businesses and cluster new ones around them.” Meter, a researcher specializing in local food economies, says these networks are among the crucial pieces necessary to construct a healthy, sustainable local food system.

Wessel Walker writes “We remain truly committed to our original vision of helping families eat healthy, locally grown, sustainably sourced food. We are also working towards a sustainable vision of farming and community—trying to be part of a food system that can last into the future.” And to think, it is all made possible by eating things like Grandma’s Chicken and Dumplings (like a real grandma used to make), vegetarian Beet and Carrot Burgers, and savory Shepherd’s Pie. The future is looking mighty delicious.

**Locavorious (frozen food CSA)**

**Owner:** Rena Basch, Ann Arbor, MI  
**Phone:** 734-276-5945  
**Email:** rena@locavorious.com  
**Season:** November-March  
**Pick-up:** Ann Arbor Farmers Market; Corner Brewery (Ypsilanti), Morgan and York (on Packard)  
**Cost:** $200  
**Website:** [http://locavorious.com/](http://locavorious.com/)

**Growing practice:** First priority is certified organic and since there’s not a lot, focus on people using organic principles, although it’s hard especially with fruit. Then go with taste. A lot is honestly taste, that’s the overriding thing. We kind of juggle or balance everything. If a vegetable is available organically we’ll go with them. For example Gardening Angel Organics - Lynne Meisner had organic raspberries. In general there’s very little available. For berries we can usually find people who don’t spray or don’t spray after there’s fruit.


This is how Rena Basch’s Locavorious website describes her entrepreneurial venture into local sustainable agriculture with a frozen food CSA. After a PhD in Materials Science and with 15 years experience running a research lab at Ford, Rena Basch says “I didn’t want to row that boat any more.” She was exploring the possibility of a business to pickle heirloom vegetables when a friend suggested small-scale freezing instead. Basch says something about that clicked “Our family had always calculated how many blueberries we needed to freeze for winter down to the pound. And then I found a guy doing this in Hudson Valley, New York. His CSA has 1000 people. I talked to him on the phone back in 2007 and he was really encouraging.”

Basch buys her fruits and vegetables at the peak of the season from local farmers and then, with the help of a few part-time staff, processes and freezes them. She says “Most vegetables do

[http://thefarmersmarketer.com](http://thefarmersmarketer.com)
need to be blanched, but a lot of books and websites have too long of a blanch time. Three minutes is the magic number for blanching in steam...I like steam because when you boil, a lot of water soluble vitamins come out. We focus on steam blanching and do a lot of small batches. It’s a lot of hand labor.”

All that careful work by hand contributes to an end product that looks as good as it tastes. In part because the frozen produce is so beautiful, Basch has chosen to use re-sealable clear plastic for her packaging. She notes that it’s a differentiator - that pretty much any other frozen produce, those white bags from a grocery for example, come from China (because their labor costs are so much lower). And while it might have a picture of the green beans on it, you can’t see what’s inside.

The Locavorious bag lets you see exactly what the raspberries or edamame look like (and how much is in it). And her website lists the names of the farmers and the farms where she gets her fruits and vegetables. Places like Tantre Farm in Chelsea, Goetz Farm in Riga, Wolfe Orchard in Tipton, Frog Holler Organic Farm in Brooklyn.

In terms of what she looks for in purchasing her fruits and vegetables she says her “first priority is certified organic and since there’s not a lot, we focus on people using organic principles, although it’s hard especially with fruit. Then I go with taste. A lot is honestly taste, that’s the overriding thing. We kind of juggle or balance everything. If a vegetable or fruit is available organically we’ll go with them. For example at Gardening Angel Organics, Lynne Meisner had organic raspberries. But in general there’s very little available. For berries we can usually find people who don’t spray or don’t spray after there’s fruit.”

For people who have only tasted frozen food from white plastic bags, the food from Locavorious will be a surprise because it tastes just like summer. Basch says taste is what ultimately convinces people of the value of local eating. She says “I heard Ari Weinzweig from Zingerman’s say ‘People will make a political purchase once or twice, but after that it’s got to taste better.’ Anyone who has tasted local food vs. imported food - that’s what really changes peoples’ minds....I’m not trying to convince anybody, I’m just trying to get to the people who want to find and eat this food. I’m trying to find the folks who are so sad that their summer CSA is over.”

Even though she’s not necessarily trying to convince anyone, she does think there are some big picture benefits. She says “I just love the whole synergistic benefit to everyone of local food. I think our food system is totally screwed up and it needs to be turned on its head. To me it’s all about taste and keeping local food producers growing food, not oil. I want to be part of changing that.”

That sense that these kinds of changes are long, complex processes is not lost on Basch. She realizes “this is for 100 years out, not for next year.... Now is the opportunity to get more young people farming again. They need land and any program you can have to get young people growing local food.”

The Locavorious CSA is a monthly distribution from November to March, with members picking up 7 or 8 bags of frozen fruits and vegetables each time. The amount has been designed to fit in a regular home freezer, though Basch says she has some customers with chest freezers who pick up their shares all at once.

She notes “This year we put up 6000 pounds of food. It was tight. We worked hard to get it all done.” And next year she wants to do significantly more. She says “I love it. I love what I do. I’ve never had such a physically demanding job, and I don’t know how the farmers do it. I’m much stronger than I was three years ago, but I’m older too.”

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Old Pine Farm (meat CSA)

Owner: Kris Hirth, Grass Lake, MI
Email: Oldpinefarm123@yahoo.com
Season: One-year full shares and half-shares from November-October, and four-month full shares and half-shares in: March-June, July-October, and November-February.
Pick-up: Once or twice per month at locations in Ann Arbor or at the farm
Cost: 1 year full share: $1290, 1 year half share: $775. 4 month full share: $525, 4 month half share: $325.
Amount: Full share is 16-20 lbs. meat per month and half share is 8-10 lbs. meat per month.
Website: http://oldpinefarm.com
Growing practice: “Natural, mostly organic, humane, hormone and antibiotic-free, grassfed, pasture raised.”

Note: Full shares include eggs, and Hirth is working with other farms to offer farm-made cheeses and sustainably caught fish.

Kris Hirth says that care for her animals is her first priority as the main factor in being able to provide a good product. But the truth is, she also loves her animals - loves working with them, loves being around them. In addition to the humane and ethical treatment of her animals, she also prioritizes heritage breeds and organic and grass feed, although her farm is not certified organic. And for people who want to eat meat conscientiously, a membership in the meat CSA that Hirth runs with help from her two teenage sons allows people to know exactly where their food is from and how it got to their plate.

If you’ve kept up with the news lately, you know that factory farm meat production in this country is among the biggest contributors to global warming and pollution, and among the dirtiest secret in our entire food system. The living conditions of the animals in these industrial operations and the low-paying, difficult and dangerous jobs for workers are nothing short of horrific. In addition to this are the facts that the unintended consequences of standard antibiotic use is contributing to the creation of bacteria that are resistant to every known drug and standard use of hormones is suspected as a cause of early onset puberty in girls.

In describing consumer attitudes toward these facts that we prefer not to know, Ruth Ozeki writes in My Year of Meats, “If we can’t act on knowledge, then we can’t survive without ignorance.” Kris Hirth and Old Pine Farm provide an alternative for conscientious objectors to the current system.

Old Pine Farm members get a monthly box of a variety of frozen meats - beef, chicken, pork, bison, and emu. All of the animals lead natural, grass-fed, hormone and chemical-free lives on an actual bucolic family farm with a beautiful, historic red barn overlooking a lovely swimming hole.

There’s no denying it comes at a price. Without growth hormones, it takes from 16 months to 2 years to raise cattle for beef - and that’s a long time for a small farmer to be paying up to $1200 month for hay. Especially when the infrastructure for processing and inspecting meat, and current farm subsidies don’t benefit her small family operation.

Commonly working 16 hour days that include bottle-feeding baby lambs 3 times a day during spring lambing season, Hirth notes she’s still in the red from last year. She observes that “if you want to get away from industrial meat and away from what they’re doing to animals, then you have to realize you’re going to pay more. To do a good job and provide a good product, I can’t compete with grocery store prices.” Her meat is generally between $6-$10 per pound. And you can visit it on the hoof at the farm any time.

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Only he can understand what a farm is, what a country is, who shall have sacrificed part of himself to his farm or country, fought to save it, struggled to make it beautiful. Only then will the love of farm or country fill his heart.
-- Antoine de Saint-Exupery

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About the Author

The Farmer’s Marketeer’s favorite summertime meal.

“Pie is the food of the heroic. No pie-eating people can ever be vanquished!”

The author knows her farmers in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where she eats and lives with her husband and cat.

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