



## COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE

# CSA

## A BRIEF HISTORY

by Karen DiTrapani

Community Supported Agriculture has its roots deep in a farming method called biodynamics, developed by Rudolf Steiner. An Austrian philosopher, Steiner introduced this farming method through a series of lectures in 1924 as a response to farmers' concern when chemicals were introduced into European agriculture after World War I.

He described the farm as a “unified and individual organism... which balances the holistic development and interrelationship of the soil, plants, animals as a closed, self-nourishing system.” This means the farm would produce many of its needs from its own land. What the farm didn't produce it would seek nearby for barter or trade, keeping the process as local and connected to the community as possible.

By following Steiner's system, farms used minimal outside energy, customers bought food at their farm stands (reducing transportation), and as a result of organic soil practices the earth was improved and water sources were kept pure.

After Steiner's death in 1925 his system of farming continued to develop and was enriched by devoted individual farmers and growers. Biodynamic practices continued throughout Europe, lost ground during World War II, then recovered again in the 1950s, particularly in Switzerland. These farms were a precursor to the modern day CSA in the United States. However, the first CSA in the U.S. did not begin until the 1980s.

The historical roots of CSA are also credited to a group of women in Japan concerned about food quality and the environmental issues of conventional farming. They formed a group in the mid-60s called *Teikei* (common translation: food with the farmer's face on it) and purchased milk directly from the farmers. The Japan Organic Agriculture Association was formed in 1971 through a *Teikei* group. There is some controversy as to the real origins of CSA in the United States; perhaps it was a combination of the two sources that contributed to the modern-day CSA farm.

One thing we know for sure is that the modern concept of the CSA farm was introduced in the United States in the early 1980s. Jan Vander Tuin, from Switzerland, brought the concept to his friend Robyn Van En, who had a farm in South Egremont, MA.

A group of like-minded individuals interested in the new concept was formed. In 1985 Van En's Indian Line Farm created the first CSA in the United States, beginning with a small apple orchard. Within four years the original 30-person membership grew to 150. Van En then personally helped pioneer over 200 CSAs worldwide, and there are now over 1,500 CSAs throughout the United States.

The CSA relationship between grower and consumer is unique in that the consumer is called a “member” and commits financially to the farm. A personal relationship between the member, grower and the farm itself develops. (Having spent a year apprenticing on a Biodynamic CSA farm in New Mexico, I have personally experienced the care and involvement of the members towards us and the farm. In return, as growers, we were enthusiastic, creative, and inventive about growing and harvesting food for our members.)

Today, CSA farmers are skilled growers of a wide variety of produce, including the more specialized heirloom plants. This well established skill set ensures a robust harvest for the growing season and a wonderful, diverse food share for each member. The share, which is purchased prior to the growing season, guarantees cash flow for the farmer and represents a commitment from the member. The shares are generally purchased as half (feeds one or two) or whole (feeds a family of four) shares and are between \$250 and \$650 a year. Shares are dropped off at a convenient location or more typically picked up at the farm. This type of pickup system supports energy conservation, reduces air pollution associated with long distance shipping, and provides fresh, nutritious, local food at fair prices.

In addition, the CSA farm is also a place of learning, sharing, and connection. Many CSA farms have apprenticeship opportunities, make the farm available to schools for field trips and host harvest fairs and other holiday festivals. Members enjoy meeting other members and creating new relationships. Belonging to a CSA farm is a wonderful way for children to experience growing food, discuss nutrition, learn about organic practices, and experience the proper care of animals. A meal has increased significance when we know and care about the grower of our food and we feel we've had a direct impact on the success of the harvest and farm.

## LOCAL CSA PROFILES

The social structure of the CSA promotes a focus on land stewardship from the member and the grower as well as aiding in the continuing development of sustainable agriculture and non-toxic, non-polluting farming practices. In addition, it represents a turn from the few (large-scale corporate farming) feeding the many to the many (local farms) feeding the many. The CSA movement as well as farmers' markets, farm stands and co-ops are in direct opposition to corporate farming, and with it the pollution and practices that have depleted soil quality and produced food grown primarily for ease of transportation rather than for vitality.

CSAs are a wonderful opportunity for the interface of conscious consumption, sustainability and community involvement. Many memberships sell out quickly and have waiting lists. Act now and become a member today; help create economic stability for South Shore farms who are striving to grow healthy food responsibly.

### Further reading:

Van En, Robyn. 1996.

*Basic Formula to Create Community Supported Agriculture: A guide on how to start up and run a successful CSA farm.*

Available at [www.wilson.edu/wilson/asp/content.asp?id=1275](http://www.wilson.edu/wilson/asp/content.asp?id=1275)

Van En, Robyn and Elizabeth Henderson. 2007.

*Sharing the Harvest: A Citizen's Guide to Community Supported Agriculture, Revised and Expanded.*

Chelsea Green Publishing

Steiner, Rudolph.

*The Agriculture Course: The Birth of the Biodynamic Method: Eight Lectures, Koberwitz, Jun 7-16, 1924 (GA 327).*

Rudolph Steiner Press.

Available at [www.steinerbooks.org](http://www.steinerbooks.org)

### Websites:

[www.permaculture.org](http://www.permaculture.org)

The Robyn Van En Center at Wilson College, Chambersburg, PA.  
<http://www.wilson.edu/wilson/asp/content.asp?id=804>



### Plato's Harvest

131 Chestnut Street  
Middleboro, MA 02346  
(508) 315-9429  
[davepurpura@yahoo.com](mailto:davepurpura@yahoo.com)

Plato's Harvest, located in Middleboro and run by David Purpura, offers a 20-week CSA program from June to November. In 2008 there were 54 members and 100 more are on the waiting list for next year. The farm hopes to be able to offer 75–80 CSA shares in 2009.

Plato's Harvest offers a wide array of certified organic vegetables. In addition to salad greens, tomatoes and squash, there are out-of-the-ordinary items such as tomatillos and edamame. Produce shares include pick-your-own cut flowers; farm honey, eggs, and meat are available to order.

CSA members travel to the farm to pick up their share. "It's good for me because it keeps me on the farm, and good for the members because they see where their food is grown" says Purpura. Delicate items like greens are washed, bunched and bagged. More durable produce is placed in bins for members to select their own. Members can harvest some vegetables right off the vine. Pickup times are Wednesdays and Fridays from 3–6 p.m. As for quantity, Purpura explains, "Each week is different. It ought to feed a family of four. You follow the farm through the changing season—in the spring you're eating lots of greens, then you're up to your ears in summer squash and zucchini, then tomatoes—you get what's prolific each week."

- Kezia Bacon-Bernstein

*continued >>*

## LOCAL CSA PROFILES

### Parlow Mill Farm

1171 Point Road  
Marion, MA 02738  
(508) 748-2312  
pmfarm@verizon.net

Parlow Mill Farm is a 50-plus member, organic, flower, fruit and vegetable farm located in Marion. Members look forward to picking up a full spectrum of vegetables, seasonal fruits, herbs, a flower bouquet and homemade bread on their chosen day each week. Gourmet salads are part of the weekly share and come washed, dried, packaged and ready for your table! The “extras” table is brimming with additional produce, as well as homemade gazpacho, tabbouleh, and other mouthwatering, ready to eat meals.

Both full and half shares are available from mid-June through the first frost. Half shares are generally enough to feed a family of four. A deposit is made in spring and “extras” are additional. Generally prices are in line with regular market prices, though for a far superior product. Flower shares are tailored to each person’s requests.

- Kristen Lofstrom

### Colchester Neighborhood Farm

90 Brook Street P.O. Box 11  
Plympton, MA 02367  
(781) 585-9670

[www.colchesterneighborhoodfarm.com](http://www.colchesterneighborhoodfarm.com).

At Colchester Neighborhood Farm in Plympton, Connie and Ron Maribett are proud to offer their 60-plus CSA members the opportunity to enjoy local, organic produce and to support sustainable farming. “One of our many goals,” says Connie, “in addition to giving people the opportunity to tune in to the rhythm of the seasons and the cycles of growing things, both animal and vegetable, is to help people learn to enjoy vegetables that grow easily in our microclimate. In many cases, this means trying vegetables that people have never heard of before.”

For sixteen weeks “farm boxers” enjoy a bounty of fresh, nutritious produce. Pickup is on Tuesdays or Saturdays, between 1–6 p.m. Members follow the list of available produce and other items written on a large chalkboard and personally select each item. Farm fresh eggs, local goat cheese, and goat milk are regularly available for purchase. Occasionally throughout the season, farm boxers have the opportunity to purchase special items such as all-natural, CNF-raised beef, lamb, and whole chickens. There are many chances for members to harvest their own produce and families are encouraged to explore the farm and to visit with the animals before or after their pickup. For more information, contact Connie Maribett.

- Kate Strassel



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### Kettle Pond Farm

181 Bay View Ave.  
Berkley, MA 02779  
(508) 822-6919

[www.kettlepondfarm.com](http://www.kettlepondfarm.com)

Kettle Pond Farm is growing by leaps and bounds. In addition to its expanding educational emphasis, the number of available shares has nearly doubled in the past two years as two of the farm's past interns, Stephen Murray and Kelly O'Neill, have started to manage the program. In addition to the CSA and farm stand, there are summer educational programs, such as Forest Week, Water Week, and Art at the Farm, run by Angela Possinger, a long-time farm participant. The farm has non-profit status, and all efforts, including the CSA, are viewed as a means to educate.

For 21 weeks, shareholders receive a weekly supply of freshly picked, certified organic vegetables, herbs, and flowers. In addition to the expected produce, shares include some rather exotic fare: cosmic purple carrots, Asian greens, heirloom tomatoes (up to six pounds in one week at the height of the season), as well as the lesser known root vegetables kohlrabi and celeriac. Shares also include a weekly newsletter covering farm news and events, recipes, nutritional information, and articles about sustainable agriculture and development.

Members pick up most of their produce in pre-packaged bags labeled with last names and flowers, tomatoes, squash and melons are chosen separately. Pick up days are Monday or Thursday between 3:00-6:00 p.m.

- Teresa Foley



### Sauchuk Farm

53 Palmer Road (Rte. 58)  
Plympton, MA 02367  
(781) 585-1522

[info@sauchukfarm.net](mailto:info@sauchukfarm.net)

Sauchuk Farm in Plympton wrapped up their inaugural CSA this past fall, with owner Scott Sauchuk calling it a "great experience—customers were very happy and looked forward to picking up their produce each week." Fifty shares were offered in the first season. Things went so well, Sauchuk will probably double the shares offered next season. "I wanted to start small and grow it the right way," he said.

The program ran eighteen weeks from early June through October. Customers picked up their fifteen pound (average) shares already packaged in reusable Sauchuk bags, but Sauchuk says next year shareholders "will probably pack their own shares, freeing up more of our time and keeping their food extra fresh." In addition to vegetables and small fruit, shares included bedding plants, cut flowers, and discounted tickets to the farm's corn maze in the fall. Shareholders also had the opportunity to purchase bulk produce at wholesale prices for canning or freezing and to borrow books about farming and local food from the CSA library on-site.

- Mike Gioscia

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## LOCAL CSA PROFILES

### Lucky Field Organics

570 New Bedford Road  
Rochester, MA 02770  
(508) 763-8104  
luckyfieldorganics.com

Lucky Field Organics, located in Rochester and run by Weston and Eileen Lant, offers a few different CSA options. Available to 225 members, the Full Season Program offers a full, small and single shares. The Summer Vacation Program (July and August only) offers full and small shares. Both feature weekly pickup at the How on Earth: The Store in Mattapoissett, Thursdays and Fridays from 2–7 p.m. CSA members are able to select their own certified organic produce and cut flowers.

While most of the food is grown on the farm, occasionally Lucky Field supplements with other local produce. “I want to have diversity,” says Lant. “Occasionally I bring in something you just can’t get as an organic, like peaches, or something we can’t grow ourselves, like Macomber turnips or Asian pears.”

Lucky Field’s Fall/Winter CSA is new this year. Available to 40 members, the program includes 5 pickups within a 10-week period, beginning in November. Members collect a pre-packaged box at How on Earth every other Saturday between 10 a.m.–2 p.m. Fall fruits and vegetables, root crops and seasonal greens make up the bulk of the share. But something unique is included each week as well—steamed brown bread, dried chili peppers, or even homemade tomato sauce.

- Kezia Bacon-Bernstein

### Silverbrook Farm CSA

592 Chase Road  
Dartmouth, MA 02747  
(508) 991-5185  
www.silverbrookdartmouth.com

Silverbrook Farm is one of the oldest operating farms in Massachusetts. Owner Andy Pollock works hard and creatively to continue that longstanding tradition. In partnership with six other nearby farms—Allen’s Neck Farm, Hillside Farm, King Farm, Shy Brothers Farm, Sylvan’s Nursery, and Matte’s Orchards—Silverbrook runs one of the best and most far-reaching CSAs around. Offerings include a varietal range of salad greens, tomatoes, beans, peppers, onions, squash, corn, fruit, and more. They also sell eggs, jams, flowers, and local cheeses. Locally raised meat products (hormone- and nitrate-free) are available by special order. About 85% of the produce is certified organic or organically grown, and all of it is freshly harvested for CSA distributions.

Several aspects set Silverbrook’s CSA apart from the rest. The main pickup is at the farm in Dartmouth, but distributions are also available in three other locations: Cambridge/Watertown/Somerville (direct delivery to home or office), Chatham (at the Nantucket Wild Gourmet & Smokehouse), and Provincetown (at the Bradford Natural Market). An eco-friendly delivery service of tricycle-trucks reaches Cambridge-area customers. Silverbrook has also innovated by bringing a CSA and small farmers’ market directly to an inner-city community health center in Dorchester’s Codman Square.

CSA members who pick up at the Dartmouth farm are encouraged to experience the activities, smells, and feel of farm life.

Sign-ups start in January via the website [www.silverbrookdartmouth.com](http://www.silverbrookdartmouth.com). Pick your desired distribution location and choose either a full or half share.

- Marjorie R. Williams



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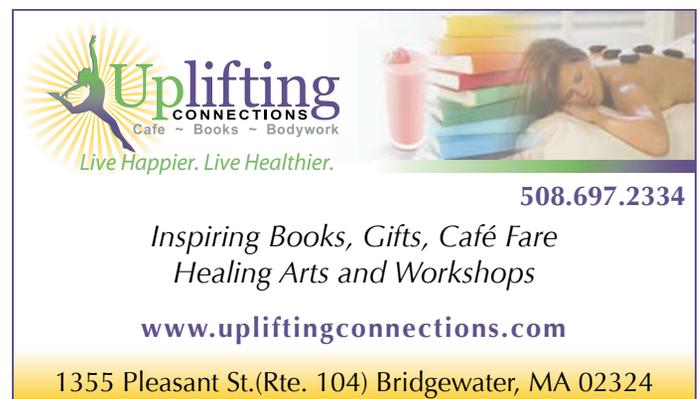
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### Moose Hill Community Farm CSA

293 Moose Hill Street  
Sharon, MA 02067  
(781) 784-5691

moosehill@massaudubon.org

Located within Mass Audubon's oldest wildlife sanctuary, Moose Hill Community Farm is a collaborative effort between the Audubon and Ward's Berry Farm, directly across the street. Ward's is contracted to do the heavier tractor farming. The Audubon Society and CSA members, who, as part of their share, agree to assist at the farm for six hours throughout the growing season, gather the harvest. Utilizing the help of shareholders both helps reduce expenses and gives the shareholders an opportunity to learn about and participate in food production. Currently in the process of becoming certified organic, the farm plants in succession to provide support for biodiversity, and uses proven organic growing techniques such as crop rotation, companion planting, green manuring and composting.

The CSA runs from June through October and has an expanding membership of over 300. Members have the option of four different pickup days: Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. or Saturday from 10:00 a.m. until noon. The method of distribution is a creative buffet style: members choose the allotted number of items or pounds from each bin, and take or leave from the extras bin at the end.

- Teresa Foley

### Bay End Farm

200 Bournedale Road  
Buzzards Bay, MA 02532  
(508) 759-8050

www.bayendfarm.com

Bay End Farm is part of a long and proud history of farming on the mainland side of Bourne. Started in 1906 by Kofi Ingersoll's great-grandmother, the farm is one of the largest tracts of undeveloped land in the area.

Ingersoll has run the certified organic farm for eleven years. His vegetable selections are as interesting as his background. Born in Ghana, Ingersoll gets his nickname from the Ghanaian tradition of naming a boy Kofi when he is born on a Friday. Ingersoll has made Bay End Farm known for its diverse greens, especially Asian ones, and its many heirloom vegetables. Bay End grows an impressive total of 35 different vegetables. This number is all the more notable since it does not include the many varieties of each type of vegetable they grow. During the height of the season, Bay End Farm strives to include 12 different vegetables per week in a CSA share.

Currently the farm has around 100 dedicated members and luckily, Ingersoll has the means and desire to expand this number for 2009. Customers either come to the farm stand between 1:30-6:00 p.m. on Wednesdays to pick up a large grocery bag of vegetables, or they go to a drop off location in Cambridge.

- Ellen Petry Whalen

*continued >>*



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food4life@comcast.net

“This is my way to change the world. Eating healthy makes people nicer and smarter,” says Jeanne Moss Chin, creator of The Organic Buying Club. The program began in 2005 when Moss Chin desired a convenient way to get local organic produce for herself every week. After starting the club as an offshoot from the Moose Hill CSA, Moss Chin eventually partnered with Jim Ward of Ward's Berry Farm in Sharon to provide set boxes of organic fruits and vegetables for pre-ordering during the winter months. In the summer they offer an all-fruit option (no vegetables). This is not a CSA or subscription service, instead, members receive an emailed list of box contents on Saturday, respond via email by Monday at 4 p.m., and pick up anytime between Thursday at 1:00 p.m. and Saturday at 12:00 p.m. Members have the option to have their orders automatically placed every week.

“At first it was just important that the food was organic; now, it's as important that it be local,” says Moss Chin. Whenever possible the produce comes from Massachusetts, or nearby New England farms. Many are certified organic, but produce is accepted from farms that are not necessarily certified organic, but practice sustainable, chemical-free farming. Moss Chin keeps an eye on prices and ensures that members get more produce for their dollar than they would by purchasing at the grocery store.

“I designed this club for myself, so I get a good variety,” says Moss Chin. The Organic Buying Club processes between fifty and one hundred orders per week. The boxes are generally one-third fruit, two-thirds vegetables. There are \$20 and a \$30 box options.

- Teresa Foley



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**The Farmer's Garden**  
140 Davis Street  
Rehoboth, MA 02769  
(508) 889-7632

**Forbidden Fruit Farm**  
307 Rock O'Dundee Road  
Dartmouth, MA 02748  
(508) 990-8837

**Pratt Farm**  
102 Fruit Street  
Hopkinton, MA 01748  
(508) 435-4147

**Quittacas Farm**  
200 Middleboro Road  
East Freetown, MA 02717  
(508) 763-3365

**Tavares Hillside Farms**  
164 Slades Corner Road  
Dartmouth, MA 02748  
(508) 636-7388

**Weir River Farm**  
Turkey Hill Lane  
Hingham, MA 02043  
(781) 740-7233  
[www.thetrustees.org](http://www.thetrustees.org)

**Online resources include:**

**SEMAP**  
Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership  
[www.semaponline.org](http://www.semaponline.org)

**Local Harvest**  
[www.localharvest.org](http://www.localharvest.org)

**Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources**  
[www.mass.gov/agr](http://www.mass.gov/agr)

**Massachusetts Northeast Organic Farming Association**  
[www.nofamass.org](http://www.nofamass.org)



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