

## Community Supported Agriculture

*Some of these facts are adapted from an article by John Henrickson and Marcy Ostrum*

*Published in 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, "From Asparagus to Zucchini" by csacoalition of Madison, WI.*

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is part of a growing social movement that engages urban and rural citizens in taking responsibility for the land on which their food is grown.

CSA consists of a partnership between agricultural producers and consumers. Consumers, known as shareholders, provide enough money in early spring to meet a farm's operating expenses for the upcoming season. In exchange, the members receive a portion of the farm's produce each week throughout the season. For some meat producers, this exchange may begin in fall with shares delivered in January or February.

Members receive only what is grown on the farm and in season. If a farmer has a crop failure, or heavy rains or a cold spring delay the onset of planting or limited animal feed, members may not receive particular products or find that they are eating cool weather crops for longer than usual. In an abundant year, members reap their share of the bounty: farmers and eaters sharing risks and benefits.

As food is harvested, it is divided into shares and distributed through centrally located pickup sites or are picked up at the farm. Harvest and distribution of produce may be cooperatively administered by farmer and member volunteers, making the farm a true community farm and communal effort.

CSA farms vary in size from ½ to 300 acres and may involve anywhere from 10–500 households. Most use organic and/or biodynamic growing methods and provide members with a wide range of fresh food. Many grow more than 40 different vegetables, fruits, and herbs. Some supply meat, eggs, honey and other products of the land.

CSA farmers use season-extending greenhouses, root cellars for storage, to provide produce up to 10 months of the year.

Each CSA farm has its own emphasis and unique characteristics. Some supply root vegetables well into the winter months. Others have a prairie restoration project and welcome member volunteers to help with prairie planting and burning. The diversity of farms allows members to join the CSA that best fits their needs and interests.

CSA is a response to the growing social and environmental problems of the modern food system. For farmers, CSA provides a more equitable return for their investment and labor while relieving them of the burden, uncertainty and impersonality of conventional marketing. The cost of ecologically sound farming practices is factored in from the beginning and shared by members. With planning focused on the needs of members, CSA farms limit waste. Closely linking farms and eaters provides opportunities for increased understanding between rural and urban communities.

CSA farms can also become focal points for education and community building. Members usually receive invitations to visit the farm on field days and to attend workshops or festivals that bring people together socially. Consumers gain a new voice in how their food is processed and distributed while choosing where their food dollars go.

**CSA History** CSA first came into practice early in the 1960's in Germany, Switzerland and Japan. As a response to concerns about food safety and urbanization of farmland, consumers and farmers organized and founded farms on the basis of a strong consumer commitment to pay the full cost of food. CSA farms came to the eastern US from Europe in 1986. In WI and MN, CSA projects began in the SE and now have networks all over the state and throughout the country.