

CSA, co-op, farmers' market keep farm busy

By **BRENNA WIEGAND**
For the Capital Press

MOUNT ANGEL, Ore. — Running a farm is a risky business. Bill and Janice Schiedler have found ways to reduce that risk.

They not only diversify what they grow, they diversify how they sell it. They have a CSA, supply a food co-op and are a cornerstone at a popular farmers' market.

Community Supported Agriculture — known by the initials CSA — has become a popular way for customers to buy local, seasonal food directly from the farmer. Subscribers to CSAs typically sign up and pay for their annual membership in the spring.

This reduces a farm's risk by offsetting the startup cost every year and making it easier to predict the coming year's income. In return, subscribers receive a weekly share of the farm's bounty throughout the growing season.

Schiedler, whose farm is called GardenRipe near Mount Angel, Ore., employs a lifetime of experience in extend-

ing his harvest season to nearly eight months with a CSA lasting through the prime harvest season and beyond.

He and his wife, Janice, own and operate the family farm originally purchased by Joseph and Kathrina Schiedler in 1874.

About 18 years ago, Schiedler quit his "day job" as manager of a grass seed processing plant and began farming in earnest, starting the CSA soon after.

Local CSA customers pick up their produce at the farm, and GardenRipe delivers to those in the Keizer and West Salem areas every week. That day comes around quickly for both producer and consumer.

"The quantity of produce you receive may seem to be a tremendous amount, and it is," Schiedler said. "If you're not prepared to deal with excess produce or are a picky eater, a CSA might not be right for you."

Schiedler is preparing the ground, setting up this year's infrastructure and has seeds starting in the greenhouse. The planting, growing, harvesting and weeding will continue into fall as hundreds of boxes are



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Bill Schiedler picks Brussels sprouts that overwintered at GardenRipe Farm and CSA near Mount Angel, Ore. Schiedler and his wife, Janice, run the farm that has been in the family since 1874.

filled and delivered.

Schiedler has changed his business model this year, scaling down the number of CSA members to 32 — about a fifth the average of previous years

— and has begun selling produce to the Willamette Valley Co-op in Salem. GardenRipe also remains an anchor at nearby Silverton's Saturday Farmers' Market.

"When you're selling at market it takes a whole day out of farming and there are costs for employees, booth fees and a lot of supplies," Schiedler said. "With the co-op's bulk situation, it's a trip to Salem and doesn't require much besides a few twist ties."

In the beginning, their three kids and Bill's mother helped work on the farm. Mom retired, the kids grew up and for many years Bill and Janice hosted interns who found the farm through ATTRA — Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas — as well as "WWOOFers." World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms, known commonly as Willing Workers on Organic Farms, affords young people the opportunity to learn and live on organic farms in exchange for half a day's work.

They still use some WWOOFers but decided to curtail the internships for the time being.

"It has to do with dependability as far as their productivity, and it can be stressful when you need to get something done," Schiedler said. Many interns have never before farmed.

He's working on about 3 acres now and the ground will soon start filling with a wide variety of vegetables. Keeping up with so many different crops is a challenge, but Schiedler prefers it to growing a single type of crop.

"I'd better enjoy doing it — I don't think I'll be joining the Fortune 500 anytime soon," he said. "It is hard to make a living farming. What a lot of it boils down to is that it is like my hobby as well so I don't have other things that I spend a lot of time or money on."

Schiedler grows several unusual vegetables such as okra, melons and celery, but the biggest demand is for traditional offerings: tomatoes, onions, corn and zucchini.

"People make fun of zucchini but we sell a lot of it," Schiedler said.

The earliest crops Schiedler produces include lettuce, greens and snap peas. These keep coming, while broccoli, cabbage and cauliflower come on. On their heels are beans, cucumbers, carrots, corn and tomatoes. He supplements his boxes with local berries a couple times a season.

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