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Support your local farmers, economy and health

BY MELANIE JESSEE

This is a very important time of year for farmers who are getting ready for the growing season, and the perfect time to ensure you get a share of the delicious veggies to come!

The reason I am writing this is to encourage people to sign up and help farmers with their spring start-up capital needs. From the mouth of a farmer, “If there ever was a year that farmers should rely on their members instead of credit, 2009 would be the perfect candidate for that.”

I know that with the way things are going, especially with salmonella recalls happening daily, many of you right now are concerned about food safety and the health of your families. Many of us are also struggling with the failing economy and the sky rocketing costs of food. So this is one of the simplest, healthiest choices you can make right now for your family, community and local economy.

What is Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)?

“CSA is a partnership of mutual commitment between a farm and a community of supporters which provides a direct link between the production and consumption of food. Supporters cover a farm’s yearly operating budget by purchasing a share of the season’s harvest. CSA members make a commitment to support the farm throughout the season, and assume the costs, risks and bounty of growing food along with the farmer or grower. Members help pay for seeds, fertilizer, water, equipment maintenance, labor, etc. In return, the farm provides, to the best of its ability, a healthy supply of seasonal fresh produce throughout the growing season. Becoming a member creates a responsible relationship between people and the food they eat, the land on which it is grown and those who grow it.

This mutually supportive relationship between local farmers, growers and community members helps create an economically stable farm operation in which members are assured the highest quality produce, often at below retail prices. In return, farmers and growers are guaranteed a reliable market for a diverse selection of crops.” (With permission from the UMass Extension)

Depending on the CSA program you choose, a share consists of approximately 20 weeks of produce, which often contains recipes from the farmer to help you diversify your diet and learn new ways to cook the veggies provided. Many CSA programs also consist of eggs, dairy, poultry, meat, and even beautiful fresh flowers!

Prices vary between CSAs and you often can choose between a large share (for larger families or three or four adults) and a small share (enough for two adults or a small family). Some programs also give you “CSA bucks” which allow you to choose what veggies you get and when.

Why is Community Supported Agriculture important?

- CSA encourages direct communication

and cooperation among farmers and consumers.

- CSA provides farmers and growers with a fair return on their labor.
- CSA keeps food dollars in the local community and contribute to the development and maintenance of regional food systems.
- With a “guaranteed market” for their produce, farmers can invest their time in doing the best job they can producing food rather than marketing their products.
- CSA supports the biodiversity of a given farm and the diversity of agriculture.
- CSA creates a sense of social responsibility and stewardship of local land.
- CSA puts “the farmers face on food” and increase understanding of how, where, and by whom our food is grown.

Buying local also greatly reduces our dependency on fossil fuels. Much of the fossil fuels used in our current food system go towards transportation and packaging, therefore buying local also saves energy and reduces the strain on our natural resources as well.” (With permission from the UMass Extension)

Resources:

There are many resources to find local CSA programs. I will list a few, but this is by no means all of them!

THRIVE in the Rogue Valley: www.thriveoregon.org <http://rogueflavor.org>

*Thrive also helps local food businesses buy/sell local products

Local Harvest: www.localharvest.org*Find farms & products anywhere in the US

Here are a few Rogue Valley CSA programs:

Blue Fox Farm <http://bluefoxorganics.com/csa/>

Dunbar Farm 326-1666

Eagle Mill Farm & Education Project: <http://eaglemillfarm.org/>

Fry Family Farm: <http://www.fryfamilyfarm.com/>

Mud Puddle Farm <http://mudpuddlefarmoregon.wordpress.com/>

Siskiyou Sustainable Coop <http://www.siskiyoucoop.com/>

Plaisance Ranch: <http://www.plaisanceranch.com/>

* Plaisance Ranch does not have a CSA, but they do have a farm store that sells Certified Organic Beef, produce, eggs, wine, and Applegate Artisan Bread.

Again, there are tons of resources and farms not listed here. I encourage you to check them out as well as support stores and restaurants that carry local products. Those in the Rogue Valley can also check out the Rogue Flavor Guide. It is a free guide to farms, wineries, breweries, grocery/specialty stores and restaurants that carry local products and more in the Rogue Valley

Melanie Jessee

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Rogue Community College student
majoring in environmental studies

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