

## Community Supported Agriculture

by

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If you are looking for ways to eat healthier and support local agriculture, a CSA (community supported agriculture) subscription might be for you. A CSA, in simple terms, is a subscription to a farm in which you receive a share of what the farm harvests on a regular basis. CSA's take many different forms but the original idea behind community supported agriculture is that community members become "shareholders" by purchasing a season's worth of the harvest at the beginning of the season. This upfront payment provides cash flow at planting time when a farmer needs it the most. The cost, generally ranging from \$300-\$600, depends on the length of the harvest season and the variety and quantity of products produced.



The first CSA models in the United States began in the 1980's. Today, the USDA estimates that there are more than 12,000 CSA farms. CSA's are a very valuable marketing model for small farmers. Selling at a farmers market is very time intensive and sales can be inconsistent, depending on factors like sunny weather. In contrast, crops are paid for in advance in a CSA. This frees up a lot of time that would otherwise have been spent on marketing and allows the farmer to focus on what he or she does best, growing high quality food. Also, CSA subscribers actually share in some of the risk that is inherent to farming, such as crop losses due to poor weather or pest pressures. Since customers are agreeing to buy what the farm harvests, crops that do well will be abundant in the share and crops that do less well will be less abundant.

CSAs are a great way to support local farmers but as I mentioned, they are also an excellent tool for improving your diet. When I first joined a CSA, my diet changed dramatically. Suddenly, I had a half bushel of beautiful produce that I had to figure out how to use before it spoiled every week. This required me to get creative in my cooking and incorporate more vegetables into every meal I made. Over time, my palate for vegetables opened up and I found that I was eating closer to the two and a half cups of vegetables recommended daily. I also started spending less on food because I was eating out less often and using less meat protein.

Because of my personal experience and dramatic diet change as a result of being a CSA member, I am always very excited to recommend it to others. If you have an interest in trying a CSA subscription, now is the time to sign up! We have several in our area with pick up locations in Hickory. There are even meat and egg CSA options. Some farms offer variations in share sizes and frequency of pick up as well. Feel free to contact me at 828-465-8243 or [mailto:kellyn\\_montgomery@ncsu.edu](mailto:kellyn_montgomery@ncsu.edu) and I will help you find a local CSA farm that could work for you.