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COMMUNITY ENGAGED EATING!

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE AND THE CONNECTIONS IT BRINGS

BY JASPER LANGBERG

When I was eight years old, my family subscribed to a CSA produce membership from a local farm in our hometown. Each week, my family drove out to the farm, my sister and I full of excitement and anticipation. We would walk around and pet the goats, getting to talk with the farmer and the other employees of the farm. Then we would go into the barn, all the way to the back where the large refrigeration room was. The cold damp room, smelling like vegetables and fruits, always had a thrilling effect on me. We would find our last name written on one of the cardboard boxes stacked against the shelves, take it down, and open it with curiosity. Inside were a dozen or so varieties of local seasonal fruits and vegetables. My sister and I would grab each item and inspect it with joy. Then we would pack it back up and head home to craft a delicious meal from all the fresh produce.

CSA stands for Community Supported Agriculture and is a form of community investment in a local farm. The program often operates on a prepaid membership system, where a member pays a certain amount of money to reserve access to a portion of the farm's harvest. The membership costs vary with different programs, harvest times, and crop variety. The average cost is around 400-700 dollars annually, and when calculated out can often be a similar price to a consumer's average cost of produce from the grocery store (Duckworth, 2023). The investment from each community member provides farms with financial support to pay for the often costly overhead of initial planting and cultivating of each season's harvest. Overhead costs include seeds (which can be expensive for strong non-GMO

varieties), labor, fuel for equipment, and other inputs (Roos 2021). After the growing season, members of the CSA farm system are rewarded with weekly access to the fresh produce the farm is harvesting.

Community Supported Agriculture programs began in Japan in the 1960s and were adapted to reflect the modern CSA system in Europe in the 1970s (Roos 2021). The creation and popularization of CSA programs has largely been in response to an increasingly industrialized global food system. The programs bring the community together and engage community members with a sense of liberty over their food and where it comes from. It has only been in the last century that communities have been severed from connection with the growing of food, and agriculture has been isolated to an industrialized system that emphasizes the minimization of human labor. This trend has been harmful to the health of individuals and the earth as a collective. The localization movement in agriculture seeks to combat the industrialization of food production by re-engaging communities with the growing process of food. CSAs are just one, largely successful, example of a localization program that seeks to achieve community engagement.



When I was in eighth grade, I got a job working for a local farm in Sebastapol, California.

When I was in eighth grade, I got a job working for a local farm in Sebastopol, California. My mom connected me with the job as a way to get me engaged with the community and begin building my

resume; something, at the time, I had really no desire or care to do. On the first day of work, I rode my bike across town and down a long gravel road on the outskirts. I found the address my mom had told me, spray painted on a rotting piece of plywood. I walked my bike down the driveway, leaned it against the barn, and poked my head into the big open doors. The farmer came over and greeted me and showed me the CSA packing process. Then I was given a big wheelbarrow full of bundles of kale. I took the bundle and placed one into each of the fifty or so cardboard boxes laid out around the barn. This process became my Thursday afternoon routine throughout the school year. Toward the end of every shift packing up the CSA boxes, members of the community would drive down the dirt driveway to come pick up their produce. I would proudly help walk the boxes over to their cars and pass them along, watching the joy and gratitude reflected on their faces.

Humboldt County has a food system that emphasizes the importance of local agriculture and food distribution. Largely, due to the relatively remote location of Humboldt, local organic farms have been a staple of Humboldt for a long time. An example of community agriculture in Humboldt is the vibrant farmers market systems operated by a local non-profit, the North Coast Growers Association. The organization manages ten successful farmers markets in Humboldt County, including the widely popular Arcata Saturday market. The markets allow small farmers to have a direct-to-consumer market that can be more financially viable than creating a wholesale relationship with local grocery stores. It also opens up an opportunity for community members to create a deeper connection with the food they

eat and the people who put in the effort to grow it.

I have had the pleasure of working on one of the local farms in the area and have learned a great deal about the process and importance of community agriculture in Humboldt. Wild Rose Farm, where I work, is a large operation compared to many of the other farms local to Humboldt; although in comparison to the industrialized farms of this country, it is still tiny. The farm sells both direct-to-consumer at the Arcata market and through grocery stores like the North Coast Co-Op and Eureka Natural Foods. Although the farm doesn't have a CSA box program, I have still gotten first-hand experience with the emphasis and importance of community agriculture in the area.

Humboldt County also has no shortage of local farms that offer Community Supported Agriculture membership programs. I hope to highlight a few locally to provide options if you would like to subscribe and become a member of a local CSA program.

- **Deepseeded Farm** in Arcata is operated by Eddie Tanner. "Bring a farm into your home and experience the seasons in a whole new way!" (Tanner)
- **Harvest Box Program** is operated by the North Coast Growers Association. "Harvest Boxes are multi-farm style CSA boxes. Each box costs \$20 plus \$5 for delivery (or \$10 for EBT customers) and will contain a variety of produce, all 100% GMO-free and grown locally by our Humboldt County farmers." (Harvest Box and Hub 2021)
- **The City of Arcata** in collaboration with **Bayside Park Farm**. "The Bayside Park Farm is a 3-acre vegetable and fruit farm located in the City of Arcata's Bayside Park. The Farm is dedicated to cultivating connections between our community and sustainable agriculture." (Bayside Park Farm | Arcata, CA)

The CSA programs I have highlighted above are just a few of the dozens of CSA programs in Humboldt County. To find out more you can visit their website and read more deeply into their missions and intentions with their community projects. Community Supported Agriculture programs give a path to divestment from large industrial agricultural systems and support of local community farms. It also connects you with the community and is a great way to meet farmers who have a long-standing relationship with the land. I continue to be involved closely with small community farms and the organizations that advocate for them. I think the support of these community programs is vital in bringing a connection to our food and a sense of care back into communities.

References

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Image: This is a photo from the farm I work at, Wild Rose Farm. The food that we grow supports the local community through the North Coast Growers Association's Harvest Box program and in other ways like direct-to-consumer, through the Arcata farmers market.