

Supporting Community and Local Agriculture

by Hilliard Gastfriend

For decades the United States has shifted away from traditional, sustainable agriculture and moved towards high-energy, artificially-fertilized, and petrochemical pesticide-based farming, primarily to allow for mega farms and other corporate farming practices. With the advent of industrial organic chemistry that mushroomed after WWII, many farmers embraced, or were encouraged to forgo, a number of traditional farming practices.

Where farmers once rotated crops, left portions of fields fallow for a season, and depended upon natural fertilizers, they now plant mono crops and use herbicides and chemical fertilizers to increase their yields and artificially enrich their soil. But this gain of crop yields comes at a severe price: the erosion of topsoil and the increased risk of more powerful insect pests that requires increasingly large doses of herbicides in a never ending cycle.

In addition to the changes in farming practice, the business model of farming has also changed. Transporting produce hundreds and thousands of miles has become commonplace, defying logic and sacrificing the very quality and taste of the fruits and vegetables that reach our tables. Most supermarkets think nothing of offering produce from countries in the Southern Hemisphere in order to guarantee year-round availability of certain products. But changes may be occurring in the collective consciousness of our nation to reverse those trends, and supporting local agriculture, preferably organic agriculture, may be making a comeback.

Here in Eugene the planting season for most local agriculture has arrived, and many organic farms are reaching out to people to contract with them to buy their quality produce and by-pass the traditional supermarket system and replacing it with a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) system. This type of arrangement could not be better for vegetarians and vegans, who

rely so much on high-quality produce and consume much greater quantities of produce than average Americans. While variations exist in how CSA works, the system primarily follows these simple protocols:

1) Households agree to pay farmers at the beginning of the season.

2) Each week the farmers deliver boxes of produce for each household.

The differences arise in:

- how long each farmer's season lasts,
- which types of produce are offered,
- whether the farmer solely supplies the produce or is part of a co-op of local farmers,
- methods of delivery and pick-up, and
- the size of the boxes of produce.

Most local farmers are preparing for their first deliveries for mid-to late May. Prices vary from \$20 to \$40 per box, depending upon how large a household (or shared households) are taking part. Many of these same farmers are familiar to those who visit the Saturday Market regularly. In fact many participating CSA farmers offer discounted prices on their Saturday Market customers for those who participate in CSA programs.

The most comprehensive source of information on how to find the right match with a given farmer may be obtained from the Willamette Farm and Food Coalition. They can be reached at 541.341.1216 or on the Internet at <http://www.lanefood.org>

(Hilliard Gastfriend is an EVEN member, volunteer, presenter and supporter.)