

CSAs Provide Food and Farm Security
Trumansburg Free Press
October 1, 2008

For a few hours a week cars pull in and out of the gravel drive for Stick and Stone Farm. Inside the big barn people pluck freshly harvested produce out of bins, then leave without the hassle of checkout lines or fumbling with change at the register. These people are members of the farm's Community Supported Agriculture (CSA).

A CSA allows people to buy shares of a farm and in return they receive fresh produce every week. Evangeline Sarat, owner of Sweet Land Farm, another local CSA, said a CSA helps both farmers and local consumers.

"In a nutshell, the farm supplies food to as many families it can and the families pay for the farm," she said.

Many CSA farms offer summer and winter programs. Summer CSA seasons are longer and offer people more produce options. Winter programs at both Stick and Stone and Sweet Land offer members canned vegetables from the summer season and newly grown winter greens.

The summer CSA at Stick and Stone Farm lasts for six months and costs members \$485. The winter season is only three months and cost \$300. Members choose one of the farm's two designated pick-up times to come collect their produce. Stick and Stone also offers neighborhood delivery to areas housing several members.

Sweet Land Farm has a 26-week summer CSA for \$485 and a smaller 12-week winter CSA for \$270. Sweet Land only offers on-farm pick-up options twice a week, but moves the pick-up operation to Hazelnut Kitchen in downtown Trumansburg for the winter season.

Katie Church, CSA coordinator at Stick and Stone Farm, said being a CSA gives farmers a better sense of security because they do not have to worry about the price of produce changing mid-season.

“The community enrolls the farmers in growing the food and the farmers have a sure market,” she said.

Having people come to the farm cuts down on the time farmers spend moving their produce. Sarat said the time she and her husband, Paul Martin, save by selling from their home gives them more time to care for the farm.

“We don’t like going to market and with [the CSA] you have the same people each week,” she said.

Local CSA farmers develop relationships with their members, whose weekly trips to a farm involves the community in the agriculture that surrounds them.

“[People] see the progression over the season,” Church said.

Sarat and Martin opened the Sweet Land CSA last year and are already beginning to form bonds between the farm and the community.

“The farmers care more about their customers and the customers care more about their farms and farmers,” Sarat said.

Sweet Land and Stick and Stone send newsletters to their members to give people an idea of what will be available at that week’s pick-up. Some items are you-pick, but most are already harvested. Items are limited if produce is scarce that week, but members can take as much of other vegetables as they can use.

“Sometimes we know what’s [ripening], sometimes something just pops up,” Church said.

CSA farms have caps on the number of members they can accept because of the limited nature of their output. There are several CSA groups in Tompkins County but Church said there is still room for more farmers to develop programs.

“The CSA farms aren’t meeting the demand in the area yet,” she said.

Sarat said Trumansburg offers the perfect location for young farmers to move in and start a CSA. Most, if not all, of the area CSA farms had a sold out season, she said, and the programs are great for people who like to try new things.

“It keeps money local, it keeps small farms viable, it keeps people fed and CSA produce is the best food around,” Church said.