

Sharing Shalom

Vol. 11

Spring 2009



Taste and See

by Tatiana Fajardo-Heflin

"O taste and see that the Lord is good."

In recent years these words from Psalm 34 have taken on new meaning for a group of families and friends in the Chicago area. For the past three growing seasons, fifty households from two churches here have shared in just-harvested, chemical-free produce from Plow Creek Farm, through an agricultural arrangement called "community supported agriculture" or "CSA."

We "city folk" hope and pray that our commitment to local agriculture serves as a support for the farm team in the intensive labor they pour into growing our food. Farming can be a thankless job, but the CSA is a small



Meg Foxvog plants tomatoes with some volunteer helpers

way for us to affirm their dedication to working the land. By purchasing a "share" of the farm produce at the beginning of the season, we commit financially to the farm and also share some of their risk. Community supported agriculture is built on the belief that farmers should not be the only ones praying for rain!

The CSA has also been a good opportunity to offer practical help. Dozens of CSA subscribers visited the farm last season for work days, and we sent hundreds of pounds of our food scraps back to the farm to be composted and worked into the soil of the CSA garden.

But I think we are the ones receiving the greatest gift through the CSA.

The truth is that good food is difficult to come by. Especially in this day and age, when the supermarket and fast food chains have taught us that "food" comes shipped from across the country (or ocean!) and wrapped in two or three layers of packaging. By the time this modern food touches our lips, it's nearly impossible to tell how any of it looked or tasted when it came out of the ground (or off the tree). Most of us under the age of sixty who live in the city did not grow up knowing how to grow a potato or prepare a butternut squash. And it never occurred to us that strawberries don't actually grow in Illinois in January.

And eating the produce of Plow Creek Farm is not just good for our bodies, it is good for our souls. We get to play a small role in an agricultural system built on interdependence, care for the earth, and reverence for God. We receive Plow Creek's food each week with a prayer of gratitude, thanking God for our sisters and brothers on the farm, and for the life that God brings forth out of the earth.

CSA subscribers here come from a wide array of backgrounds and walks of life. Some are Mennonites



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Taste and See (continued)

remembering fondly the old days on their family farms. Some are young couples or families hoping to form healthy eating habits for their kids. Some are recent college graduates enthusiastic about eating more simply and according to the seasons. And this year, as part of Living Water Community Church's new ministry to resettled refugees, five families from war-torn countries around the world will receive fresh fruits and vegetables each week. The abundance of the harvest is a great opportunity to extend love and welcome to these families that God has been bringing to the Living Water congregation.

Perhaps it is the refugee families who can most fully "taste and see that the Lord is good." Many of them come from farming backgrounds and are understandably

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disoriented by the structure of life in the city. They have seen incredible terror and pain in their homelands. But they continue to praise God for sustaining them through the struggle. And they know that a clear sign of God at work is the good food that he gives.

The advent of the growing season gives much to celebrate! We can eagerly anticipate tasting and seeing the goodness of God—in June strawberries, August tomatoes, and October sweet potatoes. All of us at Reba Place Church, Living Water Church, and the surrounding community give thanks for the land and people of Plow Creek Farm for another year of tasting goodness. •



Heather Munn and a CSA volunteer double-team a weed, a little too enthusiastically.

CSA: a commitment between a local farm and a local customer

by Erin Mucú

Community Supported Agriculture, or CSA, is a rapidly growing way some small US farms are making connections with people who appreciate good food.

In the CSA model, a consumer makes a financial commitment to a local farm by pre-paying for a weekly selection of in-season vegetables and fruits. For Plow Creek Farm and other growers, the CSA provides us with a very early season influx of income when inputs, like seeds, fuel and organic fertilizers are high; while income from produce is low, or non-existent. When our produce is abundant later in the season, we can happily supply our pre-paid CSA customers with colorful vegetables, sweet berries and savory herbs every week. This model provides the farm with needed resources at planting time, and builds a concrete relationship between the farmers and those who enjoy the food they grow.

When you buy produce through a CSA, you can bring the source of your food closer to home. CSA vegetables come from small, local farms. In a grocery store, vegetables and fruits typically travel about 2,000 miles to your store, which significantly reduces their freshness (and ripeness, since they have to be picked green to ship) and requires lots of fuel to be burned in transportation. So CSAs can make a big reduction in environmental impact while also offering the benefits of freshness and flavor for your table.

For people separated from the rhythms of the seasons, the produce received can be a reminder that the earth's goodness comes in various forms at various times. Spring is a time for leafy food like lettuce, spinach and herbs. Later in the season come fruits like peas, strawberries, beans and zucchini. In the middle and the end of the growing season come larger fruits; watermelons, squash, and roots like sweet potatoes and onions. Some of this later produce can be stored in appropriate conditions for months, extending the time you can use local produce.

For the last three years Plow Creek Farm has supplied 36-50 CSA shares. This year our CSA customers are from Chicago, Bloomington and Princeton. Next year we would like to expand the number of customers close to home.

If you are interested in sharing this commitment with Plow Creek Farm for 2010, or have questions, please contact Erin Mucú at: erinmucu@plowcreek.org •

2009 Crop Calendar

Strawberries **June**
Our kick off crop: Pick your own (PYO), preorder 8lb or more, pick up a quart or two at farmers' market, or at our farm stand. Don't miss these "Jewels."

Blueberries **June 20-July**
Before we're done seeing red in June, blueberries bring a new color to the scene about the last week of June. PYO is the best, easy picking, no bending down! During peak season you can fill your bucket at one bush! You can also pick these up by the pint at our farmers' markets.

Lettuce / Spinach / Sugar snap peas **June**
The early veggies will tickle your palate. Sold at markets.

Blackberries **July 15-Aug 15**
This juicy fruit is worth the thorny pursuit. Melts in your mouth when picked dead ripe (glossy black and falls easily off into your hand with just a gentle tug).

Raspberries **July 10-Oct 10**
Black raspberries start the season around the first or second week in July. Then the red ones start trickling in and peak around the middle of August. From then on you can PYO till frost in the fall. Also to be found by the pint at our farm stand and at markets. Will take special orders.

Green Beans **July-Sept**
The gold standard of vegetables available for most of the summer. Buy them by the pound at markets. Larger orders are accepted as well.

New Farm Intern Program

We would like to share our knowledge and excitement about farming with those who want to learn, and we recognize that we stand to be greatly enriched and have our horizons broadened by having interns as part of the farm. We offer interns the opportunity to learn by hands-on experience: planting and harvesting skills, growing cycles for various crops, use and maintenance of farming tools, plant identification skills, non-chemical weed and pest management, marketing skills, the use of mulches and irrigation, and a new appreciation for fresh, healthy food and the hard work required to grow it. Think about it for 2010!

For details visit: plowcreekfarm.com/intern.htm

Bell Peppers **July 20 till frost**
These produce steadily through out the summer in various shapes sizes and colors. A new variety this year, "Gypsy," is known for its flavor when red ripe. Pick up a couple at market for stuffing, or order by the full or half bushel towards the end of the season for preserving

Muskmelon **mid July-mid Aug**
The earliest of the vine fruits. Ask for "Hannah's Choice" for an exceptionally delicious melon.

Sweet Corn **mid July-Aug**
It's not summer till you've had corn on the cob. And you won't be disappointed with the flavor and freshness of ours; we only sell corn picked that same day. At markets or our stand. We take special orders for 10 dozen or more.

Tomatoes **mid July-Sept**
We offer some of the earliest and tastiest tomatoes around. Mouth-watering cherries, flavorful heirlooms, and red ripe slicers. At market or by special order.

Watermelon **mid Aug-Sept**
It's hard to pass these up in the heat of summer. And we'll have them in all shapes and sizes, from the small yellow ones to the larger red juicy seedless variety. Buy them at our farmers markets or at our farm stand.

Potatoes **June 21-fall**
We start digging these buried treasures around the last week of June. Buy this staple food by the pound at markets. Look for some new colors this season.

Popcorn **All year**
Once again we're growing popcorn. We have last year's crop cleaned and available for purchase. Unique to the popcorn line-up is the Muletail, a small kernel corn with an exquisite flavor.

Full crop list & latest info: www.plowcreekfarm.com

...and don't forget:

homemade bread, rolls,
and cookies from

Plow Creek Bakery

at market, or call to order:
(815) 646-4851



2009 Market Locations

Market Barn at the Farm
Mon - Sat: 9AM - 5PM

Darius Miller Park, Princeton
Tue: 3:30 - 6:30PM
Sat: 8:30AM - 1PM (starts: May 24)

La Salle Market
Tue: 3 - 6PM (starts: June 9)

**16th Annual
Strawberry Festival**
Tiskilwa West Park
Sat June 13th, 11 to 2



2009 U-Pick Schedule

All schedules subject to change due to weather, shortage or abundance.

Daily updates at www.plowcreekfarm.com

Strawberry U-Pick (June)
Mon - Sat 7AM - Noon and some evenings 4 - 8PM

Blueberry U-Pick (July)
Mon, Wed, Sat 7AM - Noon; Thu 4 - 8PM

Blackberry U-Pick (July-Aug)
follows blueberry schedule

Raspberry U-Pick (July-Sept)
Mon - Sat 7AM - 6PM, evenings by appointment

Concord Grape U-pick (Sept)
by appointment

We offer U-Pick volume discounts on >50 lbs. strawberries, or >10 pts. raspberries/blackberries

2009 Ready-Pick Schedule

Strawberry Order Pickup:
Mon, Tue, Thu, Sat 9:30AM - Noon at the farm

For Info and Ordering, call

(815) 646-4862

visit www.plowcreekfarm.com

or e-mail: orders@plowcreek.org



**closed
Sunday**

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