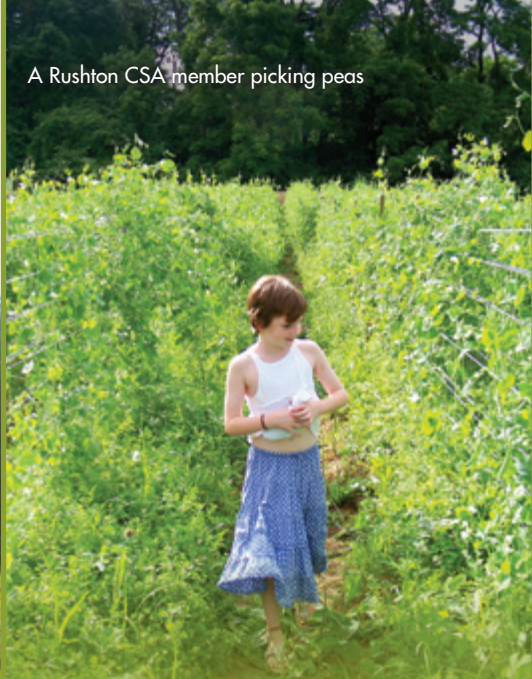


Young CSA members harvesting potatoes



A Rushton CSA member picking peas



CSA members help plant the herb garden



Reprinted **COUNTY LINES** May 2015  
MAGAZINE

# Who's Your Farmer?

PROMOTING LOCAL FOOD THROUGH COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE

Fred DeLong || Willistown Conservation Trust

{ Your kids just might eat a new green vegetable if they saw it growing a few hours ago. }

**A**S SUMMER APPROACHES, thoughts of fresh summer fruits and vegetables may start dancing in our head. What would the season be without the bounty of summer—freshly shucked corn, plump heirloom tomatoes, many kinds and colors of sweet peppers, and that perfectly ripe watermelon?

We're fortunate to live in an area where local farms and markets offer these summer treats, often harvested the same day. While some of us rely on the supermarkets for what we eat, others take a more personal and hands-on approach: they get involved with a farm through Community Supported Agriculture.

## CSA 101

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) offers an opportunity to get closer to the source of our food by buying a "share" in a local farm. The shareholder's fee helps to offset operating costs of the farm and provides a living wage to the farmer.

In return, community members come out to the farm each week to pick up a different kind of share—a share of what's being

harvested. In May, it might include strawberries and asparagus; in August, perhaps corn and peppers; in October, the week's box might offer up potatoes, beans and greens. The share changes with the harvest.

There are usually 8 to 12 types of produce offered each week, and the bounty may be larger than some families' typical supermarket haul. To help, most CSAs provide recipes and advice on how to enjoy what's given.

## A Little History

CSAs first popped up in the mid-'80s in Massachusetts, where early pioneers like Robyn Van En recognized that people wanted to celebrate fresh local food and support the farms growing it. Van En understood that there's beauty in both the growing and eating of fresh food and that nothing quite matches the taste of a freshly picked heirloom tomato or snap peas right off the vine.

The first CSAs in Chester County began in the late '90s and adopted Van En's ideas that communities should not merely eat

A mid summer pick-up is listed on the chalkboard



food but experience the process of growing and harvesting it. Chester County now features over two dozen CSAs. (See sidebar with some local CSAs)

Typically a CSA member gets a chance to come to the farm and pick up a share of what's been harvested that week. In the basic model, a box with samples from the harvest is prepared—the same mixed box for each member. Some CSAs, however, offer their weekly pick-up in a more traditional “market” style. Rather than a one-box-fits-all model, everyone loads a customized box from the farm's available produce.

Yet another CSA model has the farmer delivering the weekly shares. This is particularly popular in cities where farmers can bring shares into the city to drop-off sites. Increasingly popular are CSAs where farmers include more than vegetables—flowers, eggs, meat, cheese, fruit and other farm products.

### One CSA: Rushton Farm

Located in Willistown, Rushton Farm is an example of a Chester County CSA that offers an opportunity to experience all aspects of farming, not just the food being grown. The CSA sponsors seasonal events

and weekly volunteer days when members can do everything from planting seeds to weeding crops to harvesting vegetables.

A six-acre farm set in the heart of an 84-acre nature preserve, Rushton Farm has 120 members who come out each week to walk the preserve and pick up their shares. Their weekly bounty features over 150 varieties of fruits and vegetables from May through November. Members also enjoy “pick your own” items such as flowers, berries and herbs.

And, as with many CSAs, any extra food that's harvested or that members elect not to pick up is donated to local food banks. This

#### CHESTER COUNTY CSAs

So many to choose from, here's one of our favorites: Founded in 1709, **Thornbury Farm** offers special events like pot lucks, parties and creative classes, along with full and half shares for its CSA, with weekly baskets of produce, from June into the fall, plus free-range eggs, local honey and more for purchase at the country market.

##### Thornbury Farm CSA

1256 Thornbury Rd., West Chester  
610-793-2933; ThornburyFarmCSA.com

##### North Star Orchard

3226 Limestone Rd., Chochranville  
610-593-0314; NorthStarOrchard.com  
Offering fruit shares & veggie shares

##### Two Gander Farm

110 Buck Rd., Downingtown  
610-812-2582; TwoGanderFarm.com  
Weekly baskets, early June to mid-Nov.

##### Down to Earth Harvest

912 S. Union St., Kennett Square  
913-775-3711; DownToEarthHarvest.com  
Fresh vegs & herbs, May 19 to Nov. 14

#### Vollmecke Orchards & CSA

155 Cedar Knoll Rd., Coatesville  
610-383-4616; CSAChesterCounty.com  
Fruits & organically grown veggies

##### In My Back Yard at Misty Hollow

1020 East Street Rd., Westtown  
610-717-6949; IMBYMistyHollow.com  
Flowers, herbs & spring water

##### Yellow Springs Farm LLC

1165 Yellow Springs Rd., Chester Springs  
610-827-2014; YellowSpringsFarm.com  
Native plants & goat cheese products

##### Charlestown Farm

2565 Charlestown Rd., Phoenixville  
610-917-0252; CharlestownFarm.com  
Blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, more

##### Kimberton CSA

415 W. Seven Stars Rd., Phoenixville  
610-933-8339; KimbertonCSA.org  
Harvest season from mid-May to mid-Nov.

##### Sankanac CSA

1852 French Creek Rd., Phoenixville  
610-495-7295; SankanacCSA.com  
Watermelon, flowers & herbs, 24 weeks  
starting end of May

#### MONTGOMERY COUNTY CSAs

##### Greener Partners

3215 Stump Hall Rd., Collegeville.  
610-584-8204; GreenerPartners.org  
Feeds family of 4/share, mid-May to Oct.

#### LANCASTER COUNTY CSAs

##### Buckhill Farm

1002 Lititz Pike Suite 178, Lititz  
717-409-5027; BuckhillFarm.net  
Fresh herbs, small fruits & veggies, June to late Oct.

##### The Old Homestead Farm & Greenhouses

208 Herr Rd., Ronks • 717-669-1636  
TheOldHomesteadFarm.com  
Weekly shares of 6-10 fruits & veggies

##### Wimer's Organics

258 Spring Grove Rd., East Earl • 717-208-2098  
WimersOrganics.com • Organic beef, chicken,  
eggs & yogurt • Apr. 29-Aug. 31

#### DELAWARE CSAs

##### Highland Orchards Farm Market

3 Mount Lebanon Rd., Wilmington  
302-478-4042; HighlandOrchardsFarmMarket.com  
Fruit & veggie shares all year, meat shares Sept. to June



A late summer potluck at Rushton Farm CSA



CSA members learn how to plant potatoes



Just some of the bounty from fall harvest

way the whole community benefits, not just shareholders.

Rushton Farm CSA member Jodi Spragins says: “I know my commitment to Rushton Farm goes beyond supporting a local farmer. My membership promotes land conservation, supports local food banks, educates our children and, most of all, contributes to the health and nutrition of my family.”

### Benefits Beyond Food

When members talk about benefits of a CSA, it’s often about their children becoming engaged with the food they eat in a different way than the usual grocery

store shopping experience. Visiting a farm, seeing crops grown and food being harvested help them better understand their food and where it comes from.

Kids can walk the CSA fields, see the plants grow, and pick berries straight from the bush or try cherry tomatoes right off the vine. It’s a sensory experience. From the field to the table, your children can connect the food they saw at the farm with the food on their plates. And they just might eat a new green vegetable if they saw it growing a few hours ago.

Joining a CSA offers a family a unique opportunity to see where and how their

food is grown, and to interact, communicate and learn from the farmer responsible for growing it. All family members will better appreciate the food they eat.

CSAs are a community venture in mind, spirit and action. It’s the support of the members and the work of the farmers that create a bond around the food grown and harvested. And you’ll also get to know your farmer’s name. ♦

*Rushton Farm is part of the Willistown Conservation Trust Community Farm Program, committed to using conserved land to promote local sustainable agriculture. The Rushton CSA is currently fully subscribed for 2015. Learn more at [WCTrust.org](http://WCTrust.org).*