



Wasatch Front
CSA Collective

Growing Possibilities & Seeking Local Solutions to Food Production

BY JEFF WILLIAMS

Rebuilding the physical and social connections between people and their food producers, Consumer Supported Agriculture is growing in urban areas like Utah's Wasatch Front.

The Great Salt Lake Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) has worked to teach others about the importance of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) to serve the needs of consumers by providing fresh, locally-grown produce and encouraging a varied and balanced diet while preserving farmland and encouraging sustainable farming along the rapidly developing Wasatch Front.

Farms in Utah are working to increase the viability of their operations by diversifying

and marketing directly to consumers using a CSA model. By working collectively, farmers will be able to increase the effectiveness of educating consumers about the benefits of CSA through collaborative marketing, brochures, displays, signage, packaging and labeling, training, sponsored events, workshops, and evaluation of results.

After giving this program an identity, CSA Utah, the GSL RC&D started an intensive outreach effort. The marketing component has been the prime focus of this effort which includes contracting with a professional graphic artist to create a unique and interesting logo, creating a descriptive and memorable slogan (CSA Utah: Rooted in Your Community, Harvested for Your Table), underwriting sponsorships that were recorded on several radio stations that broadcasted to many parts of Utah, purchasing graphic advertisements in traditional and nontraditional publications with both large and small readerships as well as a diverse range of audiences.

The GSL RC&D volunteer members worked to ensure the program has a presence along the Wasatch Front as well as the rest of Utah. Other incentives to increase the capacity of CSA in Utah for both the supply (farmers participating in CSA in Utah) and demand (consumers or shareholders) sides included paid attendance to workshops (Utah Diversified Agriculture Conference in Delta, Utah), cost share funds for CSA related equipment, packaging and labeling (reusable bags printed with the logo and byline of CSA Utah), as well as a website and blog. The vast majority of this successful and growing program has been funded by a generous grant from the USDA Agriculture Marketing Service Farmers' Market Promotion Program.

By diversifying and directly marketing to consumers, local independent farms and partners hope to grow the market share for CSA thereby creating an important relationship with customers by educating them about how their food is grown, where it is produced and who is responsible for bringing fresh, locally produced fruits and

vegetables into their homes and onto their tables. The GSL RC&D hopes to educate and encourage one percent (initially) of the over 1.6 million people residing in these five counties to participate in CSA. This would equal over 16,000 consumers participating in CSA, and increase of over 14,000 more than currently participates in this fledgling effort. This joint effort to keep a locally grown food supply close to a large metropolis center has been successful but has a lot more work to ensure it meets the ever changing economic landscape of Utah.

This effort has been on-going for a number of years, but recent funding has infused the program with tangible resources to meet the challenge of connecting people with their environment, gain a better understanding for how and where their food is grown, and providing them a meaningful action that invites farming into their community. In addition, CSA gives farmers another tool by which to market their products while giving them a closer to retail price thus increasing their chances of remaining a viable agricultural entity. To date, the number of CSA farms has almost doubled from last year. The website has recorded almost 4,000 hits to date. The main purpose of CSA Utah is to provide a place for consumers to find out about CSA farms in Utah, as well as a place for farmers to educate potential shareholders about what their CSA offers.

However, there is still a large portion of the population in Utah that could benefit from participating in CSA as either a consumer or grower. There is also the challenge of making CSA accessible to low income and diverse audiences. Growing farmers along the Wasatch Front is a need that will become more challenging and critical as the average age of farmers continues to increase and farmland comes under more pressure from development. A beginning farmers program would help train and nurture new and young growers and increase the number of CSA farms in Utah. Encouraging planning commissions to allow for small farms in new developments

would help provide more opportunities for more local farms located in close proximity of new developments. Further funding for CSA Utah will help these and other opportunities and challenges associated with CSA in Utah.

CSA Utah is one of many ways that local farmers can market their goods and services in a way that will increase the diversity and sustainability of their operations. Consumers can make a positive difference in their communities by supporting a local farm. This connection, both physical and social, between producer and consumer is becoming less common in our economic world. CSA may increase the likelihood that farmland will be preserved even in the most developed areas. Shareholders can enjoy the many benefits, such as a varied and healthful diet, decreased transportation costs, having a voice in what and how their food is grown, and more. ●

About the Author

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Author's Picks for Further Reading

Henderson, Elizabeth and Van En, Robyn. 2007. *Sharing the Harvest: A Citizen's Guide to Community Supported Agriculture*. Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing.

Alternative Farming Systems Information Center

national.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/csa/csa.shtml

CSA Farms Management and Income
cias.wisc.edu/economics/community-supported-agriculture-farms-management-and-income/

CSA Utah
csautah.org

