



# The Next Best Thing to Being a Farmer: CSA Farms

*By Bill Bradley, Registered Dietitian and Cookbook Author*

I always thought I wanted to grow my own food, but I never seem to have the gumption or the time to actually do it. I have eaten enough home-grown fruits, vegetables and herbs to know that everything local and in season tastes better than anything you could get at a supermarket.

But how can I get organic produce at a good price without becoming a farmer on the side? Enter CSA's. CSA stands for Community Supported Agriculture and the idea, which is now a national movement, began right here in Massachusetts. The basic premise of the CSA model is that you pay a farmer for a yearly share of farm products at the beginning of the season, and the farmer uses all the shareholders' payments to run the farm, grow the produce, pay the employees and pay themselves. You would think that this kind of arrangement would cost a lot of money, but it is actually a huge savings from buying even non-organic fruits and vegetables at the store.

My wife Christine and I have a share at Mountain View Farm in Easthampton, Massachusetts. For around \$350 we buy a couples share and what we receive every week from May through October is quite incredible. Usually, we get 7 pounds of a selection of vegetables and we get other fruits and veggies on top of that. Plus, we can go out into the fields and pick fresh herbs, flowers and produce such as strawberries, raspberries, tomatoes and peas. I would guess that we are getting closer to 12-15 pounds of delicious,

organic produce per week. Except when it's watermelon season, or tomato season; then we have to bring extra bags to carry the bounty back to the car!

Every week feels like harvest time! We get to go to a beautiful farm that is surrounded by incredible scenery, pick out our vegetables, socialize with the farmers and friends who are fellow shareholders, and generally just relax. It is a very kid friendly place and kids get to learn where their food is actually coming from (and even get to pick some themselves).

The only issue that we have with our farm is keeping up with the abundance! Sometimes, it is hard to keep up, but we have gotten really good at using our produce at almost every meal. For example, this week we got eggplant, potatoes, tomatoes, leeks, lettuce, kale, peppers, cabbage and beets. When I got home I immediately baked an eggplant, tomato, potato and onion dish and made a bean soup with kale and tomatoes and topped it all off with a tomato salad with olive oil and salt. Voila, I have a few days' worth of food that I prepared in about an hour.

When the tomatoes are really plentiful we make a huge batch of tomato sauce and freeze it in Ziploc bags for the winter. We do the same with pesto when the basil is 'pick all you can use' and we also freeze blanched kale that we can use later in stir-fries or soups.

If you are looking for nutrient-packed, local, organic produce that gives you a wonderful shopping experience in nature once a week and a chance to meet new people, then buying a share in a CSA farm will get you all that you need.

[Here is a link that will help you find a CSA farm in your area.](#) Also, a CSA farm isn't always about produce. You can also buy farm shares of meat, seafood, cheese, bread, eggs and even grains. Check out what is around your area. I hope you give CSA a try, you will be glad you did!

