

*Editorial*

# Community Shared Agriculture

## A Win-Win-Win situation

The idea of Community Shared Agriculture (CSA), a concept in which consumers get a diversity of high quality, fresh vegetables to their table at an affordable price while supporting small scale environmentally friendly farming, is growing. The fact that it is flourishing is an achievement that deserves recognition. For too long consumers, farmers, and the environment have all been the big losers in the conventional food system. We don't need to mention who the winners have been.

Consumers have lost because the nutritional quality of food grown thousands of kilometers away is inferior when compared to locally grown, fresh vegetables. Consumers have lost because there is no effective control system in place to protect consumers from pesticide contaminated foods, and more than likely there never will be. Therefore, the only real way of knowing what you eat is to know the farm from where the food originates. For consumers, Community Shared Agriculture provides that opportunity to get to know and trust a farmer to supply them with fresh, nutritious, tasty food.

The farmer is also a winner with CSA. Instead of a steadily decreasing share of the food price pie, the farmer gets 100 per cent of the consumer's purchasing dollar. Instead of the risk of low commodity prices and glutted markets, the farmer gets a guaranteed income and market. Farmers can go without crop insurance and use few if any pesticides because the risk of crop failure from bad weather or pests is shared between the farm family and the consumers. Less pesticide use on the farm protects the health of the farm family yet does not jeopardize their income. It also enables young farmers to enter agriculture without huge amounts of debt.

The environment is also no longer a loser. CSA dramatically reduces energy consumption in food production, transportation, and refrigeration. It also uses less pesticides. The environment benefits because, if people have access to affordable, high quality vegetables, they will eat less processed foods and meats. There is less waste in this type of vegetable production since any extra production is passed on from the farmer to the consumer. The consumer can process the vegetables for winter use or pass the extra vegetables to a friend or neighbours. Consumers can also recycle their compostable materials back to the farm.

CSA also justifies the protection of green space near cities and may be another worthy reason to set up community land trusts. Farmland near cities that is not used for farming is ripe for rezoning and development. It must be used for a worthwhile reason if it is to be kept in green space over the long term.

CSA is a win-win-win system. The number of farms involved in CSA is growing because any good idea will thrive if given a chance. CSA deserves institutional support. The Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Association has been the first institution to get behind Community Shared Agriculture. Let's hope others follow suit. CSA is the means to put the culture back into agriculture.

Copyright © 1994. **REAP Canada**